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Finland's *Rare Exports: A Christmas Tale* taps into the grim lineage of Santa Claus to deliver a Yuletide yarn for horror fans.

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by **TREVOR TUMINSKI, JAN DOENSE, JAMES KING** and **ALICE JANOSCHEK**

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# NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND



*Leprechaun: Back 2 tha Hood* – it might just be the perfect Christmas film.

It's such an affront to the so-called holiday spirit that when I watched it on Christmas Day a few years ago, it kinda felt like kicking Santa right square in the jingle bells. I like anything that puts some tarnish on the tinsel, though, because I hate Christmas.

*Hiss, boo, humbug*, etc. Yeah, yeah...

To clarify, there are things I love about the Christmas season: time off, gathering with friends and family, parties, generally being thoughtful, eating Mandarin oranges and, of course, drinking eggnog fortified with the haughty bum of liquor.

But there's so much I despise about it, too. Mainly it's the one-two punch of Christianity and consumerism – lawns filled with plastic nativity scenes made in China and bought at Walmart. Malls that resemble Romero movies, abominable Christmas music, Boxing Day sales that turn into riots, Hallmark TV specials only a Stepford Wife could love, condescending church signs ("Lets keep the Christ in Christmas"), mountains of mass-produced plastic trinkets followed by mountains of garbage at the curb – and don't forget those shit-awful Cosby sweaters with reindeer on them. Horrifying. As for the story of Christmas itself, I don't find three wise men and a manger any more genuine than, say, a murderous, bong-smoking leprechaun.

Certainly you can accuse Halloween of rampant consumerism – there's plastic crap aplenty adorned with black cats and pumpkins. But at least we don't celebrate it for a quarter of the year. Stores now put out Christmas stuff before October 31, and by the time all of the Boxing Week sales are done and the decorations are put away, it's almost February. Who can have that much manufactured sentiment pushed in his face for that long without pushing back?

You'll feel that gleeful anti-Christmas sentiment throughout this issue, from the cover story on *Rare Exports: A Christmas Tale* to the Classic Cut on John Updike and Edward Gorey's *The Twelve Terrors of Christmas* to our Christmas-themed Sick Top Six. It seems that trashing tradition has developed into a tradition of its own. Case in point: five *Silent Night, Deadly Night* movies. There's a famous segment of Siskel and Ebert's *At the Movies* – easy to find on YouTube, search "Silent Night Ebert" – from November 1984 in which they histrionically condemn the film for showing Santa as a killer, going so far as to read out the names of the people behind it in order to literally shame them. Siskel: "You people have nothing to be proud of ... your profits truly are blood money. ... Shame!"

The next year, when the sequel was released, *Entertainment Tonight* did a news report about the "shocking" movie, during which producer Ira Richard Barmak rightfully called out the balcony boys as hypocrites using the controversy surrounding the film to further their ratings, saying, "They know very well that the most effective thing they could've done was not review the picture." *Silent Night, Deadly Night* obviously isn't gonna make any horror top 100 lists – any more than *Leprechaun: Back 2 tha Hood* is being groomed for a Criterion release – but good on Barmak and his cohorts for fighting crass commercialism with crass commercialism. For all the reasons I love the horror genre, sometimes I simply love its ability to incite anger.

Or, in the case of *Rare Exports*, to undo some of the rampant cultural appropriation. Juuso Helander, co-writer of the film, describes it as "payback" for the way North Americans have "torn apart almost everything Finnish that we had in our Christmases." Much like Disney did with Grimm's fairy tales, North American ad men, songwriters, graphic artists and filmmakers fabricated a Jolly Old Elf who stands in sharp contrast to the more Old Testament-style Santas. (Contrary to popular belief, Coca-Cola was only one of many entities responsible for the rebranding.)

So, when the sacred is this profane, why not make the profane sacred? Go ahead, deck the halls with piss and shit. Pour yourself a Scotch, throw another manger on the fire and treat yourself to a *Leprechaun* marathon this Christmas.

After all, as Leprechaun himself says in *Back 2 tha Hood*, "Don't you presume to tell me right from wrong. You compromised all you believed in once you got the gold."

Dave Alex

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*Horror Culture & Entertainment*

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COVER RARE EXPORTS - A CHRISTMAS TALE
Designed by Gary Pullin

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# POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM




*RUE MORGUE #105* is the best single magazine I've ever seen about anything. Let me be more precise. There are magazines about pop culture, music, coin collecting, comic books. There are news magazines and sports magazines and women's magazines and men's magazines. But I have never come across a single magazine that did what it intended to do so well. The cover demands you at least open the damn thing. The binding, the paper stock – you can feel in your hands the high quality of the physical product. The selection of photos, the excellence of the writing – there were very few articles I wasn't interested in, and there were a few where I was surprised at how interested I became. You take what you cover seriously, yet it's a fun read. It's thorough as hell. You cover horror from a half-dozen or more media perspectives. If you wanted to give the uninitiated a primer on what the current state of horror is in popular culture and entertainment in October 2010, all you'd need to do is hand them a copy of *RM#105*. Now, I don't know if *all* of your issues reach this level of awesomeness, but: 1) I'm your newest subscriber, and 2) I'm starting to scour the internet for back issues, as I'm only missing 104 of them at this point. Party on!

**MAURICIO HEILBRON JR. – SAN PEDRO, CALIFORNIA**

I WORKED FOR FORRY ACKERMAN in the late 1960s and early 1970s. You ran a review of my book *Keep Watching the Skies* not long ago. I never met Alfred Hitchcock but I did know Robert Bloch reasonably well. Hitchcock did not consider *Psycho* a comedy. Yes, it has some amusing stuff in it, but it is what it has always been regarded as: a horror movie. Bob Bloch told me the first time he saw *Psycho* he was sitting between Janet Leigh and Hitchcock. Leigh had also never seen the movie. She was terrified by the shower murder, squeaking in fear and hiding her face in Bob's arm. On the other side, Hitchcock had his hands folded across his tummy and was chuckling – not at the movie, but at Leigh's reaction which, of course, was exactly what he intended. Bob didn't know who bought *Psycho* for filming until it was announced as Hitchcock's next movie. The movie was in production when Bob moved to Southern California; he managed to go to the set incognito. There's a lot about this in Bloch's autobiography. It's also true that he based the character of Norman Bates in part on *Castle of Frankenstein*'s Calvin T. Beck. I heard this from Bob himself. Norman looks like Beck, and Beck also had an uncomfortably close and dependent relationship with his mother – not Norman Bates close and dependent, of course.



**BILL WARREN – ADDRESS WITHHELD**

JUST READ *RM#105* and loved it. I especially loved your "50 Reasons to Love Horror Comics" since I'm a fan myself. But you forgot a couple of titles that belong in that category, like *The Crow* and *Spawn*. *The Crow* because it's about a man and his girlfriend who have been murdered. He is brought back to life by a mysterious crow to bring revenge against his murderers so he and his girlfriend's souls can rest in peace. *Spawn*'s about a mercenary who has made a deal with the Devil that he will be reunited with his wife should something happen to him after he dies. Five years later, he is brought back as a hellspawn with a living costume and supernatural powers.

**DARK MIKE – NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK**

AS A RABID HALLOWEEN FAN, I have to point out that Last Chance Lance's assertion that "it took an animated television special, *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown*... to fully entrench them (jack-o'-lanterns) in the mind of the North American public as the symbol of the season" is, well, just plain wrong. Mark B. Ledenbach's *Vintage Halloween Collectibles* shows dozens of jack-o'-lantern decorations dating as far back as the 1920s (at least). Perusing the book quickly shows that jack-o'-lanterns were a primary symbol for Halloween decades before the 1960s. Even a simple Google image search on "vintage Halloween postcards" will turn up Halloween postcards that significantly pre-date 1966 (the year *Great Pumpkin* debuted) and prominently feature our good friend Jack. I'm not usually one to wag a finger but as somebody who makes his living on the Halloween season (and has a jack-o'-lantern tattooed on each forearm), this isn't one that I could let slide. Sorry, Lance. I'm still a big fan.

**CHAD SAVAGE – SINISTERVISIONS.COM**

*[We'd argue that "firmly entrench" is a relative term in this case, but thanks for the additional info! – Ed.]*

I SO ENJOYED READING THE REVIEW Miss Garces-Sloane did on *Madeline's Halloween and Other Spooky Tales* DVD that I just purchased a copy of my very own online! I'm looking forward to settling back in front of a roaring fire with a bowl of popcorn and watching the spooky adventures of Madeline and her friends! I can't wait to read Miss Garces-Sloane's next review! Maybe she'll do a review of *Hocus Pocus*? It's one of my very favourite Halloween movies.

**KRISTI WILLIS – COLUMBUS, OHIO**

IN REGARDS TO THE LETTER in *RM#105* about *I Spit on Your Grave*, real-life murder and rape upset me. People with any sense of morality would agree that these things are evil and should not be tolerated. However, when these evils are observed as fiction, some of us find it highly entertaining and stimulating. That's certainly a reason why we buy this rag every month. Just because I enjoy it from a fictional standpoint does not mean I get off on the real thing. When I watch a *Saw* film, or any other film that portrays extreme gore, it's because I want to see human beings get mutilated, tortured and ultimately murdered. This same logic can be applied to a rape/revenge film. In the case of *I Spit on Your Grave*, I'm entertained because through the first half of the movie I get to witness a human being get sexually violated, and in the second half I get to view a human mutilate and kill other human beings. I enjoy that kind of fiction. Does that mean I want to go to Darfur or Rwanda and see the real thing? Of course not! Get off your high horse and stop being a hypocrite. How is being entertained by fictional rape any worse than being entertained by a family getting fictitiously sliced to pieces? There is no difference. Murder and torture are just as evil as rape. Movies such as *High Tension*, *Irreversible*, *Inside* and, yes, *ISoYG* all fit in the same category: they're all for people who enjoy watching evil done to others, fictitiously of course.

**JOE WHITEFORD – KOKOMO, INDIANA**

I'M A RECENT SUBSCRIBER and long-time reader of your magazine, and I've always enjoyed your coverage of the horror genre over the years. But *RM#102*, while filled with great articles (especially the profile of *[REC 2]*) had one major error. In your review of the film *The Shadow Within* by Silvana Zancolò, you referenced the filmmaker as a he. Zancolò is actually a she. I was fortunate to have met her when the film screened at the St. John's International Women's Film and Video Festival a couple of years ago. *The Shadow Within* was an impressive piece of work, so it should only be fair that this Italian female filmmaker be acclaimed for her efforts, especially where in the same magazine, there's an article about a women's horror film festival. Check out her MySpace at myspace.com/szzzo. Other than that glaring error, the issue, as usual, was entertaining and informative.

**KEVIN KELLY – ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND**

*CORRECTION: We incorrectly published a photo of the band Groove Armada in place of tomandandy in* RM#106. *The correct photo can be seen in* RM Digital #106. Rue Morgue *regrets the error.*

WE ENCOURAGE READERS TO SEND THEIR COMMENTS VIA MAIL OR EMAIL. LETTERS MAY BE EDITED FOR LENGTH AND/OR CONTENT. PLEASE SEND TO INFO@RUE-MORGUE.COM OR:

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# Dreadlines

NEWS HIGHLIGHTS HORROR HAPPENINGS

## FAMED HAMMER DIRECTOR ROY WARD BAKER DEAD AT AGE 93

Directing films featuring schizophrenic babysitters, epic disasters and busty lesbian vampires. To a horror fan, that's quite a career.

Roy Ward Baker, a prolific British filmmaker who helmed many horror and science fiction classics for Hammer Films, including *Quatermass and the Pit*, *The Vampire Lovers*, *Scars of Dracula*, *Dr. Jekyll & Sister Hyde* and *The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires*, died October 5 at the age of 93.

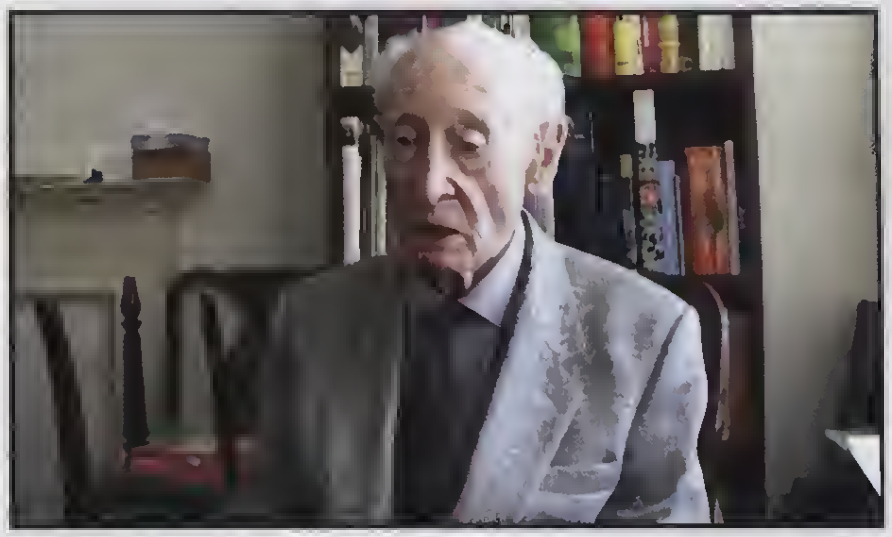
"Baker was always workmanlike, with occasional flourishes," says Hammer historian Robert Simpson, who appeared in a 2008 Hammer documentary with the filmmaker, from his home in Northern Ireland. "His strengths lie in teasing out the drama and the performances of his cast. . . He's up amongst the great Hammer directors certainly."

Born Roy Horace Baker in London on December 19, 1916, his desire to pursue a filmmaking career emerged as early as 1928, when his father took him to see a silent film in a renovated theatre in Leicester Square. Once out of school, he started at the very bottom of the industry, fetching tea for demanding directors. By 1934, he was assistant director to Alfred Hitchcock on *The Lady Vanishes*.

"Baker had learned from the best, starting off his career with Hitchcock, and I can't help but wonder if those early experiences shaped his future career," says Simpson.

Although credited as a director in the 1940s, his big break came in 1953, when he directed the suspenseful *Don't Bother to Knock* (1952), starring Marilyn Monroe in the atypical role of a troubled babysitter, opposite Richard Widmark. But the film for which he will best be remembered is the Rank Organization's *A Night To Remember* (1958), based on Walter Lord's book about the sinking of the Titanic. Unlike other cinematic versions of the 1912 disaster, Baker's film cared not for a romantic subplot trivializing the doomed ocean liner but strove for historical accuracy and a realistic, claustrophobic style, terrifying the British movie-going public.

After a falling out with the Rank Organization, Baker spent most of the 1960s working in television, directing episodes of *The Avengers* and *The Saint*. His experience in TV made him prime fodder for Hammer, who'd, like many studios, preferred to keep budgets low. But besides being an economically minded director, Baker brought along a refined level of seriousness to his projects.



***Roy Ward Baker** was considered to be "workmanlike" and a "gentleman."*

Simpson notes, "Baker had always been very frank and warm about his experiences on the Hammer films. When he started working with Hammer, on *Quatermass and the Pit*, he treated it quite rightly as a serious drama, and that was always his policy."

Ingrid Pitt, who played Mircalla Karstein in *The Vampire Lovers* – Hammer's first foray into the world of busty vampire seductresses – recalls that Baker was also a gentleman, especially when handling some of the studio's more lurid subject matter, such as the nudity and gory lesbian love scenes. "I had thought that there was going to be a lot of leering and blood dripping from canine teeth," she tells *Rue Morgue* from London. "Roy explained there had to be that side of it, but when the blood lust was dormant he just wanted a sweet, natural girl having a pleasant time."

Simpson adds that the film would not be as revered without Baker's particular touch. "The producers on *The Vampire Lovers* might have wanted something more salacious, but Baker treated the script straight and, with the actors he had at his disposal, produced something far more respectable than a lesser talent might have."

Although Pitt only worked with Baker that one time, the colleagues kept in touch throughout the years, often visiting for tea. "He was a lovely man and I will miss him like mad, especially on Grand Prix weekends," she says, when he would "drop in and give his opinion on the latest crop of overpaid and underperforming drivers."

Honour Baker's memory by contributing to his memorial site, roywardbaker.people2remember.com.

**ERIC VEILLETTE**




# JAMIE FOXX SHEPHERDING NEW MULTI-ETHNIC HORROR ANTHOLOGY SHOW

The television horror anthology is a notoriously tricky venture. In spite of an impressive lineup of horror and pop culture luminaries on both sides of the camera, neither *Masters of Horror* nor *The Hunger* made it past its sophomore season; *Fear Itself* didn't even get that far, with NBC yanking Mick Garris' *MoH* follow-up after only eight episodes. The success enjoyed by *The Twilight Zone* and *Tales from the Crypt* has so far remained elusive for 21st-century television producers.

Filmmaker Deon Taylor (*Dead Tone*, *Chain Letter*) thinks he can change that with *Night Tales*, an upcoming series that will put an urban spin on the anthology model. If recent history is any indication, Taylor is fighting an uphill battle, but he does have one thing that similar efforts have lacked: mainstream star power in the form of Academy Award-winning actor Jamie Foxx, who will share producing, directing and even writing duties with Taylor on *Night Tales*' first 26 half-hour episodes.



***Night Tales:*** *Denise Richards is a vampire host in the new horror anthology TV show with an urban spin*

"I've always been a huge horror fan, probably more than I should be – I just love it," Taylor says. "And what got me into horror movies and made me want to make them was *The Twilight Zone* and *Tales from the Crypt*. Growing up, I used to watch them all the time. As I got a little older and started getting into writing and directing, I thought, wouldn't it be cool to revisit that world for today's audience?"



Taylor got his chance to do just that a few years ago with a movie called *Nite Tales*, which aired on the BET network in 2008. The film, which consisted of two horror tales hosted by rapper and reality television star Flavor Flav, enjoyed strong ratings and a positive response from viewers. Taylor has been trying to turn it into an ongoing series ever since, but it was Foxx's involvement that finally gave him the boost he needed.

"Jamie likes scary stuff," Taylor says. "One day he said, you know, I've always been a fan of what you did with the *Nite Tales* movie. We talked about my plans to turn it into a series, and the next thing I knew, he had a script. Jamie actually wrote the pilot episode."

Taylor is aware that horror anthologies are a tough sell nowadays, and that his will need something to set it apart from the ill-fated series that came before. While *Night Tales* will constantly evoke the spirit of successful anthology shows of the past, it will offer at least one element that Taylor thinks those shows were missing.

"We'll follow the same tone as *Tales from the Crypt*, but I wanted to make the stories a little hipper for today's audience. Times have changed since *Tales* – and especially *The Twilight Zone* – first aired, and what I wanted to do was make episodes that would speak to what we call the YouTube audience. So one thing we did to that end was we made them all multi-ethnic. In one episode, a Japanese actor might play the lead. In another, it might be Tom Arnold. Another episode might star someone like 50 Cent. I just wanted to open it up, because I feel like the world is a melting pot, and one of the biggest things I want to do with the horror genre is to open it up and allow it to speak to all types of people."

Besides the re-branding from *Nite Tales* to *Night Tales*, the television series will differ from Taylor's original movie in another, more dramatic way. In one of the strangest casting shake-ups in recent memory, Flavor Flav has been replaced by Denise Richards and Stacey Dash, who will portray a pair of sultry vampire hostesses known as Fury and Rage.

The inaugural episodes of *Night Tales* are currently in production in Los Angeles, and Taylor and Foxx are shopping the series to a variety of networks with an eye toward a winter 2010/11 premiere. While Taylor thinks the series could have a strong showing on network television, he says the broadcaster will ultimately depend on his and Foxx's "appetites for how hardcore [they] want the episodes to be." Taylor and Foxx also have plans to expand the *Night Tales* brand to include feature films, comic books, an interactive website and even Halloween costumes.

**APRIL SNELLINGS**




# ROADKILL



**infinitesanta.com**
If you prefer your Xmas trimmings to be blood red and mutant green, tune into *Infinite Santa 8000*, an animated web series set in a post-apocalyptic future, where Santa and all other remaining survivors live in a kill-or-be-killed world largely infested by icky monstrosities. A new webisode will be posted each week 'til Christmas, so why not add a little horror to your holidays?

**mondomark.blogspot.com**
Regular *RM* music scribe and blog contributor Mark R. Hasan has a website of his own where he regularly dissects scores, movies and various filmic subgenres. While not entirely horror-centric, there are entries on *Psycho*, nunsploitation flicks and upcoming soundtrack releases, as well as four years of posts in the archives.

**inventorspot.com/articles/snow_globes_14655**
No one will blame you if you immediately think "cheesy kitsch" when you hear the words "snow globes," but this site will blow away all of your preconceived notions. The fourteen scenes presented here run the gamut from murders in-progress to giant, stalking spiders. Includes links to buy or make your own gory globe!

**eyepus.blogspot.com**
If Hollywood horror has got you down, take a break from the big-budgets with the sporadically updated Eyepus blog. While it does cover some mainstream fare (recent props go out to *Piranha 3D* and *The Walking Dead*), more typical entries include interviews with low-to-no-budget artists and filmmakers, such as *Massacrator* director Pierre Ayotte.

**scary.biz/games/2920/infectonator-christmas.html**
Though pretty lo-fi by today's standards, this point-and-click Flash game challenges you to infect a certain amount of innocent civilians before Christmas Day arrives. Drop your zombie toxin on unsuspecting crowds and watch it spread, but beware of the cops who are working hard to stop your undead army dead in its tracks.

Compiled by **MONICA S. KUEBLER**
Got a Roadkill suggestion? Email a link to **roadkill@rue-morgue.com**

## *UNTIL THE LIGHT TAKES US* DUO MOUNTING A HORROR FEATURE

Continuing to prove the nihilistic influence of Scandinavia's black metal underground, Audrey Ewell and Aaron Aites, the makers of the documentary *Until the Light Takes Us* (*RM#98*), are now seeking funding for a horror flick guaranteed to boost your despondency levels exponentially.

Inspired by a real-world scientific experiment, and co-written with Nev Pierce (editor-at-large for *Empire*, the UK's largest movie magazine), *The Egg* involves a group of grad students working in a high-tech research facility when the rest of the world goes silent. "It's so early, it would be suicide for us to say too much more about the plot now," Ewell notes. But off the record she assures us it's a doozy, best described as a melding of Cronenbergian body horror with *Food Inc.*'s "we're fucked thanks to big business" sensibilities.

The filmmakers are currently seeking development money (including a fundraising page on kickstarter.com), relying in part on the success of *Until the Light Takes Us* (recently released on DVD and Blu-ray in North America) to open doors. Not only is this the opportunity to dive into a genre that appeals to them but, Ewell says, "I think you can sneak messages into horror and sci-fi without being preachy." Unchecked capitalism in particular gets a serious drubbing in the rough draft of the script that's currently being polished by the three.

As far as their new collaborator goes, the filmmakers met Pierce at the Athens International Film Festival, where he was on the jury that awarded *Until the Light Takes Us* the Golden Athena for Best Documentary. Chatting at the after party, the three realized they shared similar world views, but "Where Aaron and I are on the darker, artier side of things, Nev is immersed in a different, perhaps more commercial, culture," Ewell says. "This brings a new element to the whole that adds an unexpected twist to our work."

However, it might take some time before *The Egg* is realized on screen. First, the trio has to raise the money to put together concept art, storyboards and other materials. As Ewell puts it, "The way you get financing is to actually do the producers' jobs for them."

**A.S. BERMAN**

## ENTRAILS

❯ Adnen Brody has sued the producers of the much-panned 2009 Dario Argento film *Giallo*, claiming they failed to pay his $640,000 salary. Apparently the producers prevented him from walking off the set by getting him to sign a "pay or play" deal in which he agreed to defer payment with the understanding that he could "withhold consent to the use of his likeness in the picture" until he got his money. In the suit, Brody claims that when he attempted to exercise his rights, the producers said they would never pay him. He's seeking a permanent injunction against *Giallo*'s distribution (too late, it hit DVD in October), the money he's owed, plus $2 million for several infractions, including misappropriation of his publicity rights.

❯ The Brothers Quay, the twin filmmakers behind such surreal stop-motion works as *Street of Crocodiles* and *The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes*, are now working on a short documentary about The College of Physicians of Philadelphia's Mütter Museum. The museum is home to many medical anomalies including a plaster cast of original Siamese twins Chang and Eng. The short, financed by a $287,000 grant from the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, will be screened at the Mütter Museum, the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

❯ Former Guns N' Roses guitarist Slash recently launched Slasher Films. The company, co-founded with Scout Productions (*Session 9*, *Transsiberian*), aims to make fright flicks with a '70s/'80s feel in contemporary settings, with Slash taking on an unspecified production role. First up is *Nothing to Fear*, about a family in rural Kansas menaced by an ancient demon. "I've always been a huge horror fan, and creating films that take you back to the days where horror movies actually scared the hell out of you is something I've always wanted to do," Slash said in a press statement.

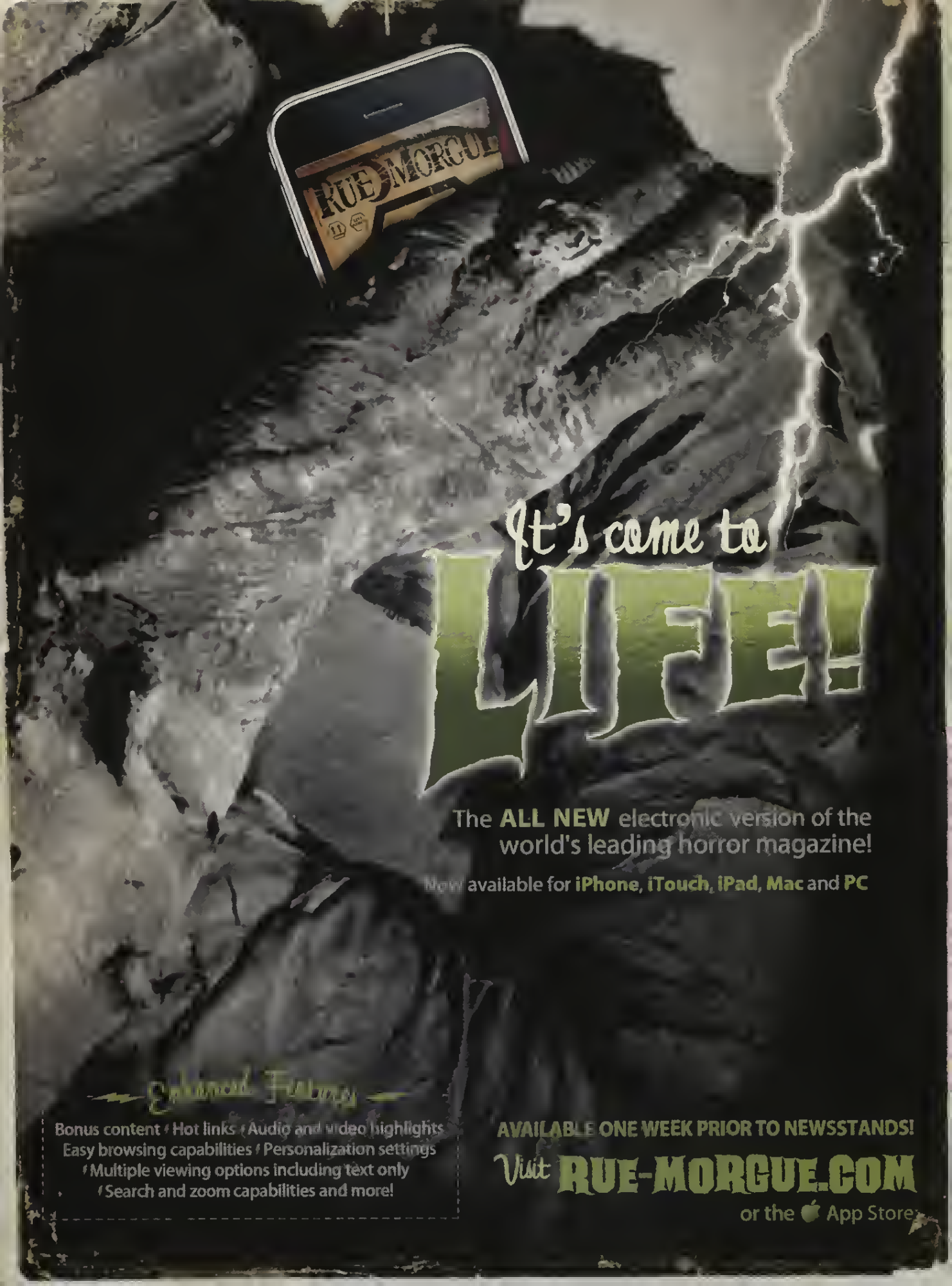
❯ Noboru Iguchi, the blood-on-a-budget maestro who made *The Machine Girl* (2008), is taking the reins for the eighth installment in the *Tomie* J-horror series, *Tomie Unlimited*. Model Miu Nakamura will star as the supernatural title character, who drives men to dismember her and promptly regenerates from the remains. Based on the popular Junji Ito manga, the movie franchise kicked off in 1999 with *Tomie*.

❯ The newly resurrected Hammer Films is now expanding into books with its own imprint, thanks to a deal with Random House-owned Arrow Books. The publisher plans to release six horror novels a year starting next spring, award-winning author Jeanette Winterson (*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*) is currently working on a novella for the new line, which is due out next summer.

❯ Actress Gloria Stuart died on September 26, at age 100. Though probably best known today as the old lady in James Cameron's *Titanic*, she also starred opposite Boris Karloff in *The Old Dark House* (1932), with Claude Rains in James Whale's *The Invisible Man* (1933) and in William Castle's *The Whistler* (1944), among others.

**A.S. BERMAN**





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# CORONER'S REPORT

## WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

CASE NO. 107

Icelandic folklore states that everyone should receive at least one piece of new clothing for Christmas, or run the risk of being eaten by the Christmas Cat, an oversized and particularly vicious black feline.

To protest the release of the 1984 film *Silent Night, Deadly Night*, critics Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel read the credits out loud on their television show while saying, "Shame" after each name.

A traditional Christmas ritual from Greece involves a priest tossing a crucifix into the town's water supply to keep the *Kallikantzari* (gremlin-like spirits) at bay. These spirits can also be chased away by burning a shoe or salt, or by placing the jawbone of a pig at one's front door.

Roy Moore's *Black Christmas* (1974) screenplay was allegedly inspired by an actual series of murders that took place in Montreal around Christmastime.

In the Ukraine, it is considered good luck to find a spider's web on Christmas morning.

In the 2005 film *Santa's Slay*, numerous references are made to star Bill Goldberg's previous professional wrestling career, including one scene in which he walks through a home while his signature wrestling ring entrance music plays in the background.

In early England, the main course of a traditional Christmas dinner consisted of a severed pig's head cooked with mustard.

Brandon Maggart, who plays psycho-in-a-Santa suit Harry Stadling in 1980's *Christmas Evil* (a.k.a. *You Better Watch Out*), is the father of Grammy Award-winning songstress Fiona Apple.

The Celts and Teutons believed that mistletoe had magical properties, so they would hang it in their homes to bring good luck and keep evil spirits at bay.

Actor John Carradine never utters a single word in the 1974 film *Silent Night, Bloody Night*. The croaking sounds made by his character were all added in post-production.

In Italy, *La Befana*, a kind, broom-riding witch, delivers gifts – much like Santa Claus – to children on the night of Epiphany Eve (January 5).

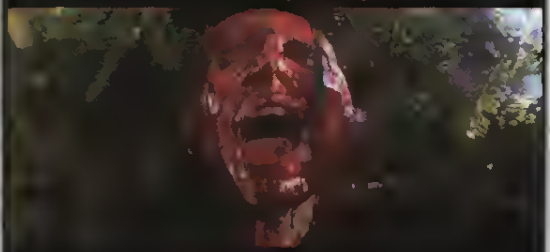
Twenty-five-year-old rhythm-and-blues star Johnny Ace died on Christmas Day in 1954 while playing a game of Russian Roulette.

On Christmas Eve in Norway, after dinner is done and all the gifts are opened, it is common for families to hide all the broomsticks in their houses, because an old-time superstition suggests that witches and other mischievous entities come out to steal them for riding.

Compiled by **MONICA S. KUEBLER**

Got a weird stat or morbid fact? Send it through to **info@rue-morgue.com**

# THE RUE MORGUE SICK TOP SIX



## CHRISTMAS KILLS

1. **TREEVENGE**
   A TOWN GETS TRIMMED
2. **SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT**
   BEHEADED ON A SLED
3. **BLACK CHRISTMAS (1974)**
   CRATERED BY CRYSTAL UNICORN
4. **CHRISTMAS EVIL**
   SANTA'S CHURCH STEP SLAUGHTER
5. **SANTA'S SLAY**
   CANDY CANE THROUGH THE BRAIN
6. **JACK FROST**
   DECORATED TO DEATH




JAMES FISHER **zirceocircus.com**




**NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT (198**

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## 3 CATACOMB BOXERS

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The swirling skull-and-bones fabric of these shorts, designed by the late Alexander McQueen, is dark and elegant. Granted, the price tag may be terrifying for a pair of gotchies, but how often do you get to adorn your nether regions with underpants inspired by the Parisian catacombs? Bone up on haute couture at **alexandermcqueen.com**

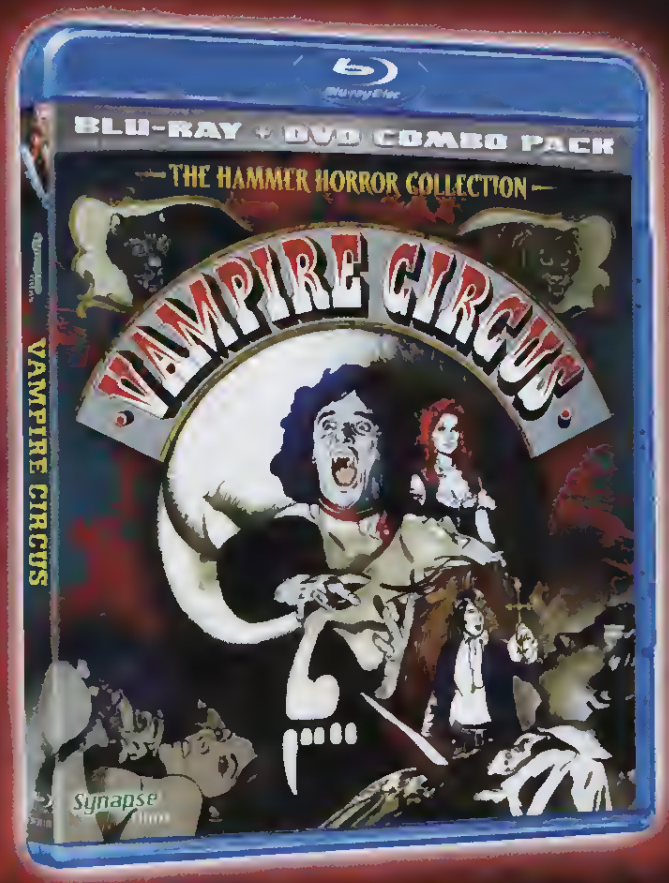
## 4 2011 ZOMBIE PINUP PLANNER

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FINLAND'S

# Rare Exports
## A Christmas Tale

TAPS INTO THE GRIM LINEAGE OF SANTA CLAUS TO DELIVER A YULETIDE YARN FOR HORROR FANS.

# Bad Tidings

TREVOR TUMINSKI

WERE YOU AFRAID OF SANTA CLAUS AS A KID? WAS IT THE GIANT BEARD, THE BLOOD-RED SUIT WITH FUR TRIM, OR THE ALMOST SINISTER-SOUNDING "HO, HO, HO" THAT MADE YOU QUAKE IN YOUR BOOTS? MAYBE YOU'RE STILL A LITTLE WARY OF THE HOLIDAY FAT MAN. WELL, THAT'S NOTHING — *SOME* CULTURES OUTSIDE OF NORTH AMERICA HAVE TRADITIONALLY HAD A TRULY SINISTER VERSION OF ST. NICK, NOT THE JOLLY, COCA-COLA-SCRUBBED BEARER OF GIFTS WITH THE FABLED NAUGHTY LIST, WHOSE BIGGEST THREAT WAS A LUMP OF COAL IN YOUR STOCKING ON CHRISTMAS MORN". SOMETIMES, SANTA WAS DOWNRIGHT EVIL...

It's commonly understood that, depending on your geographical location, modern-day Santa Claus originally evolved from either the Christian legend of St. Nicholas of Myra – a particularly charitable 3rd-century Greek Bishop who developed a reputation for the proverbial working of miracles and secret gift-giving – or Odin, a wise old god from Norse mythology who dabbled in magic, poetry, prophecy and battle from atop his perch on a flying horse. Over the centuries, these two ideologies became intertwined and eventually took on different forms, including Britain's Father Christmas, the French Père Noël and, perhaps most phonetically notable, the Dutch Sinterklaas, before becoming homogenized into the rotund fairy tale character we know and love. (A new Dutch slasher film called *Sint* hopes to change all that, see p.19.) Most of these past incarnations were similarly good-natured purveyors of holiday cheer but lesser-known accomplices such as Germany and Austria's Krampus and the Netherlands' Zwarte Piet (Black Peter) certainly boast back stories that lend credence to any suspicions you may have harboured about Santa and his helpers.

In 15th-century Holland, Black Peter was both Santa's right-hand man and the poster boy for Christmas' dark side. The tall, gaunt, dark-skinned devil-looking creature would alternately hand out lumps of coal to bad children, lay the beats on them with a big stick or stuff them into a bag to take them to Spain as punishment! Though the legend is still around today – a frequent topic of Dutch debate due to revellers donning blackface and afro wigs to depict him – Black Peter's evil image has been dropped, along with his whoopin' stick, in favour of that of a cheerful, elf-like assistant to Santa who regularly hands out pocketfuls of candy.

Krampus, on the other hand, has origins tracing back to pagan rituals during the 17th century, but it wasn't until the late 19th century when Christmas cards in the alpine regions of Europe were adorned with this hideous, horned demon who punishes bad children and suggestively torments women. As lore has it, Krampus (whose name originates from the old High German word for "claw") accompanies Santa on his journeys, punishing the bad children and, like Black Peter before him, collecting them in a basket on his back, but this time for special delivery to the pits of hell. These days, though, the legend of Krampus has been largely reduced to a costume worn by young men in Eastern Europe during the first two weeks of December, particularly on the eve of December 6, to roam the streets frightening people with rusty chains and bells. (See p. 20 for a closer look at the tradition.)

Now Finland may be further north than the Alps but that doesn't mean children from the Nordic country aren't aware of Santa's sinister roots. In 2003, Finnish writer/director Jalmari Helander and his co-writer brother Juuso showed another side of St. Nick with their seven-minute film *Rare Exports Inc.* The clever, award-winning short established Father Christmas as a literal monster. More accurately, a whole race of them: savage, bloodthirsty beasts hunted and captured in order to be systematically groomed and retrained to love children. Once reformed, the kinder, gentler versions would then be crated and dispatched across the globe for the requisite appearances at malls and staff Christmas parties near you. Rare exports, indeed. The short earned itself a cult following online and, two years later, spawned a ten-minute sequel called *Rare Exports Inc. Safety Instructions* – an instructional video on how to properly protect oneself from Santas with a taste for human flesh. Hint: distract them with gingerbread!

This month, Jalmari fully unwraps the twisted concept with the feature film *Rare Exports: A Christmas Tale* (opening in select markets throughout December). Incorporating all of the grandeur and cinematic qualities of a Christmas classic, including a sweeping holiday score, this *Rare Exports* tells the story of a mischievous boy named Pietari whose father (a professional hunter) and his cohorts find their seasonal harvest of reindeer slaughtered, seemingly due to the ignorance of workers at a mysterious archaeological dig on top of nearby Korvatunturi mountain. Pietari's father, suspecting wolves killed the reindeer, sets a trap on the day before Christmas and snares a most unexpected catch: a naked and downright menacing-looking old man, who the precocious Pietari identifies as Santa Claus.

Eager to recoup their losses, the hunters conspire to hold the ragged Kris Kringle for ransom from the wealthy mogul funding the dig. That is, until he enlightens them to the fact that their capture is merely one of the big man's minions, and that the sizeable object exhumed from the depths of the mountain is the true centre of the Christmas conspiracy. Turns out the gargantuan block of ice the workers unearthed encases the frozen remains of the real Santa Claus – a towering, horned behemoth with a less-than-festive reputation, who the Finnish townsfolk sealed inside the mountain centuries ago for safe keeping. Once all of the town's children go missing (and creepy, wicker dolls are left in their place), it's up to Pietari and the hunters to do battle with a bearded, buck-naked army of kid-hungry, Santa look-alike elves who have been lying in wait for the return of their legendary master.

Armed with diversionary gingerbread cookies, we tracked down the Brothers Helander, climbed up onto their laps and asked them about how they came to thrust a candy cane into the heart of one of the world's most beloved traditions. The pair proved to be men of few words, but something about their dry wit and reluctance to reveal all of the secrets of how they turned a nasty lump of coal into a memorable, offbeat, dark Christmas film made for a bit of the old holiday magic.

***How did you conceive of the unusual story for* Rare Exports?**

**JUUSO:** It all began years ago when Jalmari wanted to create a short film about Santa Claus as a Christmas present to the clients of the production company he worked for. I suggested that we should make an advertisement for a company that hunts and domesticates wild Santas, and that we should treat it like the product was a rare whiskey from a traditional, old distillery. Jalmari didn't like the idea at first but eventually realized that it could be interesting. I co-wrote the original shorts and some very early scripts for the feature film. The final script maybe has one or two lines of dialogue that I've written, all the rest is Jalmari's work.

**JALMARI:** I was investigating the old Santa and I was a little bit interested in why it was turned into something else, and totally the opposite of the original one. There has to be some sort of a conspiracy behind it

***Juuso, what is the dynamic of your working relationship with Jalmari?***

**JUUSO:** Well, I'm Jalmari's little brother and that says a lot. His being a director is something I kind of got used to as a child when we were playing. We also often seem to share the same creative vision so it's really easy to come up with stuff we're both pleased with.

***What was Christmas like for the two of you?***

**JUUSO:** In Finland we get the presents on Christmas Eve – and Santa hands them to us personally. I don't remember seeing Santa many times so I guess he stopped visiting us when I was very young. I wonder why..




***Handle With Scares:** Pietari (Onni [illegible], front centre), his father Rauno (Jorma Tommila, far right) and the group of hunters with one of their captured Kringles.*

CONTROVERSIAL NEW HORROR FILM *Sint* TWISTS THE DUTCH SANTA MYTH INTO SOMETHING DOWNRIGHT SAVAGE.

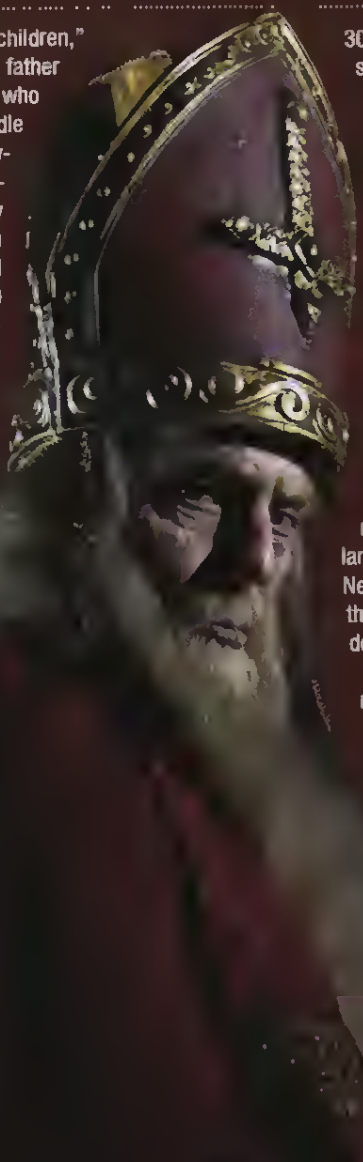
# Slasher Claus

SAINTDOOM

OBVIOUSLY SPEAKING, IT'S NOT A VERY SHOCKING POSTER. YET A SURPRISINGLY LARGE NUMBER OF WORRIED PARENTS FELT THE NEED TO – ALBEIT UNSUCCESSFULLY – FILE A COMPLAINT WITH THE DUTCH ADVERTISING CODE COMMITTEE OVER THE ONE-SHEET FOR *SINT*. THE MARQUEE IMAGE FOR DICK MAAS' CHRISTMAS-THEMED SLASHER FILM SHOWS THE SILHOUETTE OF A BISHOP ON HORSEBACK: THE ICONIC SAINT NICHOLAS, FRIEND OF CHILDREN, WHO CELEBRATES HIS BIRTHDAY ON DECEMBER 5 BY GIVING PRESENTS TO ALL RIGHTEOUS YOUNGSTERS. It's a myth, of course, dating back to a historical figure from the 3rd century whose story was exported by the Dutch to New Amsterdam (now New York), where Saint Nicholas eventually became Santa Claus. In the 19th century, the Saint Nicholas myth was "commercialized" and nowadays it's the biggest annual money-maker for Dutch shopkeepers. But obviously there is something not quite right with this particular version of the Saint. His hair looks thin, his trademark snowy beard is gone and the cross on his hat is inverted.




"This Saint Nicholas is not the friend of children," says writer/director Dick Maas, himself the father of two young kids. "In my film, he is a bishop who was expelled from the Church in the Middle Ages and subsequently roamed the countryside with a bunch of pirates, looting and raping before being burned alive by angry civilians. Before dying, he swears to return whenever December 5 coincides with a full moon, which occurs about once every 30 years. And, of course, now happens to be such a year."



Enter teenager Frank (Egbert Jan Weeber) and two of his friends, who earn some extra money on December 5 by making the rounds as a "Deputy Saint Nicholas" and his helpers, the so-called "Black Petes." Soon the mayhem begins. Frank's friends are killed off in gruesome fashion and Frank finds himself teamed up with cynical elderly detective Goert (Bert Luppes), who saw his entire family butchered 30 years ago and has since waged a lonesome and misunderstood crusade against the murderous Saint.

"The idea for *Sint* came to me about ten years ago," says Maas, who is known internationally for offbeat genre fare such as *The Lift* (1983) and *Amsterdamned* (1988). "I thought it would be fun to make a horror film about this icon of goodness. In the Netherlands, Saint Nicholas is a hugely popular figure and it's basically not done to fool around with him. But in these days of sex scandals in the Roman Catholic Church, it can't hurt to point out that Saint Nicholas is actually a scary old man. ... Also, his assistants, the Black Petes, carry around rods to beat the crap out of children who haven't been nice."

Needless to say, before anyone had even seen it, *Sint* had already caused a commotion in the usually quiet and tolerant lowlands. At the time of this writing, initial box office returns in the Netherlands, following the film's November 11 release, indicated that it was on track to becoming a hit. (International distribution deals have not been concluded yet.)

In a country that is not known for big-budget, action-packed movies, Maas has consistently been pushing the envelope and *Sint* is no exception. The film boasts a wide variety of stunts, special effects, visual effects and a surprising amount of gore for a mainstream movie. One of the film's showstoppers is a chase high above the streets of Amsterdam's historic city centre, with Saint Nicholas racing his white horse across the snowy rooftops and jumping over the streets. The scene is an elaborate combination of plate shots, combined with green screen and CGI.

"Budgets are always limited in the Netherlands," says Maas, "but we do have the knowledge and I think we can compete with American films. I think a chase scene like ours would easily have cost as much as our whole film did if done in Hollywood."



SOME PA... OF E... OPE. S..., NICK B...NG M... E THAN JU T PRESENTS. NAMEL... ...D ... K TO STR KE F AR INTO ... EARTS O NAUGHTY ... EN

# Krampus Comes Calling

... K

'S DECEMBER 6, AND I'M IN A COUNTRY HO... IN THE BAVARIAN FOREST. ... S ST. NIKOLAUS' DAY, WHICH MEANS ... M SURROUNDED BY FAMILY AND THE CHILDREN WAI... ANXIOUSLY BY THE WINDOW FOR A VISITOR S... DENLY THERE ... A KNOCK AT ...HE DOOR AND THE YOUNGST...RS EXPLODE WITH EXCITEMENT IT ... THE SIGNAL THAT "ST. NIKOLAUS" HAS ARRIVED WITH THEIR PRESENTS. TRADITIONALLY, HOWEVER, ...HIS VIS... WAS THE CAUSE OF MUCH ANXIETY BECAUSE THE SAINT ...DN ... TRAVEL ALONE. FOR BAD ... BOYS AND GIRLS, THAT KNOCK AT THE DOOR COULD ALSO MEAN ...E ARRIVAL OF NIKOLAUS' SINISTER COMPAN...DN, THE MONSTRO...S KRAMP...S.



## KRAMPUS
### THE DEVIL OF CHRISTMAS

Found in German and Austrian folklore dating back to medieval times, the Krampus is Nikolaus' evil counterpart, accompanying him on his visits to children on St. Nikolaus' Day. A fusion of man and beast, the Krampus is typically portrayed with cloven-hoofed feet (or one human foot and one hoof), a body covered in dark hair, a long tail, twisted horns sprouting from its head, and the face of a man with a distinct snake-like tongue protruding from its mouth. A figure of absolute evil, its purpose is to evoke fear in disobedient children.

While variations of a "dark half" to the benevolent gift-bearing Santa Claus exist throughout various parts of Europe, few match the sadistic nature of the Krampus. St. Nikolaus' Day, as celebrated in Bavaria and Austria, has roots in the generous bishop's godly return to Earth to reward those who have been good the previous year. Following him on this trip, however, is his dark cohort who, as Monte Beauchamp notes in *The Devil in Design: The Krampus Postcards* (Fantagraphics Books, 2004), "terrorizes the bad until they promise to be good." For some, this would mean a spank or slap from Krampus. Others he would beat mercilessly with his swath of sticks (a common sight in much of the artwork collected in Beauchamp's book). But for the truly wicked, he would shackle their arms and legs, cram them into a large sack or wooden basket, drag them out to the woods and beat them further – or worse, according to *Dämonen Monster Fabelwesen* (Ulrich Müller and Werner Wunderlich, 1999), a German creature compendium – hurl them into the fires of hell.

Still an active presence in the holiday season, over the past century Krampus has developed a strong, demonic iconography in Bavaria and Austria. Fuelled by images on postcards and paintings, and even chocolate treats (German candy maker Milka carries a Krampus chocolate figure during the holidays), the core of Krampus worship is the celebrations called "Krampulauf" or "running of the Krampus." Held around December 5 or 6 (depending upon geographical location), people






dress up as the creature and march through the streets, tormenting the community.

Typically, someone dressed as St. Nikolaus would walk through the centre of town, handing out gifts as if in a parade, flanked by locals lining the street. Ahead of him would be droves of people dressed in ornate Krampus costumes, "chased" by Nikolaus. While every village and town would have its own variation on the event, for the costumed Krampuses (Krampi?), the night becomes a party.

Weighing up to 20kg and costing up to 2000 euros [$2790 USD], elaborate costumes are usually made out of goat or sheep fur with birch, bells and finally a devilish handmade wooden mask. While some of the less athletic participants tire and stop for a rest (at which point they are petted by daring children and called "Streichelkrampus" or "pet Krampus"), in many cases, the tradition is marked by all kinds of (usually alcohol-fuelled) anti-social behaviour. In recent years, one Krampus was even arrested for banging a fourteen-year-old boy's head against the side of a church. Some have described the spirit of the night as a cross between Christmas and Halloween, for its mix of gift giving and good tidings with hellish rebellion.

The popularity of the Krampus figure has grown immensely in the past decade, inspiring websites, social media groups, merchandise, a film (thekrampusmovie.com) and a book called *Krampus: The Devil of Christmas* (out now from Last Gasp).

The smiling kids running around in the country house have no reason to fear the banging on the door, but there was a time when they would've frozen in their tracks at the sound of that knock, terrified that the Krampus was coming to take them away.





***Your version of Santa obviously isn't grounded in the jolly North American Saint Nick, so what were you drawing upon?***

**JALMARI:** The original Finnish Santa was a terrifying guy with big horns and this terrible mask made of some animal skins. He was the kind of guy who comes to people's houses on Christmas Eve demanding gifts for himself. Every child, and even the grown-ups, were a bit afraid of him.

**JUUSO:** It's a mix of authentic Finnish folklore and ideas we came up with. For example, the Finnish Santa originally did have goat horns, and in the modern folklore Santa Claus really does live in Korvatunturi Mountain. We, of course, had some other ideas for Korvatunturi.

***Was this the version of Santa that you grew up with in Finland?***

**JALMARI:** No, this was from a long time ago.

**JUUSO:** The internationally known jolly Santa had already infiltrated the Finnish traditions before we were born, although there are a lot of stories of not-so-jolly Santas every Christmas. Since Santa Claus comes to visit Finnish homes every Christmas Eve, there needs to be a hired Santa Claus. They often get part of their pay in booze and so the last families they visit often get to meet a bit more special, not-so-happy and not-so-good-smelling Santa Claus who might not remember your names, and might vomit on your Christmas presents!

***The short film is much more like a hunting documentary than the feature film. What made you change the focus of the story to be about Pietari?***

**JUUSO:** It felt obvious that the feature film couldn't be just an 80-minute-long remake of the shorts. There had to be a bigger story in it.

**JALMARI:** You have to have some kind of story and not just one joke. That's the reason, to have something you can actually follow for one-and-a-half hours.

***When you make a Christmas movie, you're obviously dealing with material that's considered sacred by some, and yet you pretty much desecrate everything about Santa Claus, at least all that North Americans hold sacred. Were you worried about the reaction to the film?***

**JALMARI:** No, not at all. I'm happy about everything bad that's happening to Christmas. I know there [are] lots of people in Finland who cherish the tourist Santa Claus thing in the northern part of the country. I hope this movie does well and destroys it all.

**JUUSO:** You could consider this to be some sort of weird payback since North Americans have already torn apart almost everything Finnish that we had in our Christmases. So I wasn't worried, I am really eager to see what happens. It seems that the biggest shock for US audiences is the amount of "old man dick," as someone put it.

***Are you not fans of Christmas?***

**JALMARI:** I like Christmas food a lot but not the commercialism

***Beast Buddy:*** *(left) An example of the Krampus costumes worn during Krampuslauf and some traditional depictions of Saint Nick's sidekick, and (top) Pietari researches his own Christmas monster.*



***Not-So-Silent Night:*** *One of Santa's ragged elves about to be resurrected with gingerbread, and (below) a field of slaughtered reindeer near Korvatunturi Mountain.*

**JUUSO:** I am a huge fan of Christmas foods.

***Jalmari, the visual style you use for the film is very fun, very slick and very vibrant. What were your main influences for the look of it?***

**JALMARI:** I don't know. Good movies – American big-budget films is the style I wanted to do. I tried to imitate them as much I could.

***It was quite a different look from the short film, though, which was a bit more muted.***

**JALMARI:** I think that's because we shot [the short] in the winter, which makes it monochromatic and a little bit dull. We had this nice moment in the weather [while shooting the feature] that brought out all the colours of the sky and the mountains. Also, I like the style of when we were doing night shots, to have this bright yellow in the colour of the lights. [*Rare Exports*'] light reference was *Hellboy II*."

***You also have a really strong assortment of logos and graphics in the film – who did them and what made you decide to use such iconography in the movie?***

**JUUSO:** I made all the logos and graphics for the film – excluding the Santa Claus illustrations that were made by a friend of mine. I feel that it all adds to the level of detail that makes the world of the film more real and the film itself more immersive. There are a lot of little things that you could notice in freeze frames that may put a smile on viewers' faces. For example, all the text in the Santa Claus books actually make sense. I wrote all these news stories of ancient Santa Clauses. Even though no one will get to read them – or know how since it's written in Finnish – it kind of expands the Santa Claus mythology on some level. Or that's what I say to myself.

***The orchestral music you had written for the movie is so sweeping and full of grandeur for such a darkly comedic story. What were you hoping to achieve with the score?***

**JALMARI:** I like big music and I listen to a lot of soundtracks – *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Signs*, *Unbreakable*, *Transformers*. I write and think about my movies [to music] and I've always been a big fan of movie themes. I kept telling that to [Jun Seppä], who made the music, and he

> "THE MOST INTERESTING THING ABOUT CHRISTMAS TO ME IS THAT CHILDREN ARE STILL AFRAID OF SANTA CLAUS WHEN THEY SEE HIM FOR THE FIRST TIME."

***Are there North American filmmakers that influence your style?***

**JALMARI:** I guess so but it's hard to name one exactly because it's a combination of all the things I've liked. Of course there has to be an influence if you watch two movies a day.

***Which you do?***

**JALMARI:** Yeah, I try to.

***Even though this is technically a holiday movie, the male nudity and some of the scary scenes aren't really for kids. Who did you make this movie for?***

**JALMARI:** [Laughs] I guess I made it for myself because I didn't have any people to tell me what I could and could not do. I just made what I felt like. In Finland, the nudity part isn't so weird. I don't think anybody will react to that in Finland. In America, it's a little bit of a different thing, I understand now. [Laughs]

***You also mentioned you have an idea for a sequel?***

**JALMARI:** I have this idea of what will happen after they send the Santas all over the world. The planes are crashing down and something bad is going to happen.

***Can you tell us a bit more than that?***

**JALMARI:** Actually, I won't.

***Were you afraid of Santa Claus when you were a kid?***

**JUUSO:** I don't remember. I believe I was.

**JALMARI:** I guess every child is a little bit afraid of him when they first see him. Very interesting…

***Why do you think Santa Claus can be scary?***

**JALMARI:** The most interesting thing about Christmas to me is that children are still afraid of Santa Claus when they see him for the first time. My theory is that it's the same kind of fear you have of spiders and snakes. It's something you're born with – an instinct for something bad that's going to happen. But then you forget it with all the propaganda we now have about Christmas.

**JUUSO:** A genatinc, hairy stranger who comes to your home and tries to hug the children. Hmm.




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THIS MONTH CRITERION RESURRECTS GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S DEBUT FEATURE, **CRONOS**. TO CELEBRATE, THE FILMMAKER TALKS ABOUT RE-IMAGINING VAMPIRES, BUILDING INFERNAL MACHINES AND BEING EXORCISED AS A CHILD.



# DAMNATION AND Alchemy

*by* PHIL BROWN

**THESE DAYS IT'S TOUGH TO FIND A MORE PRODUCTIVE FIGURE IN GENRE CINEMA THAN WRITER/DIRECTOR GUILLERMO DEL TORO.** Flush from the success of 2006's *Pan's Labyrinth* and the *Hellboy* series, he currently has more horror films in various stages of development than some studios (see sidebar for a rundown). It's a position that most genre directors can only dream of being in. Almost in recognition of del Toro's rise to prominence, this month the prestigious Criterion Collection is releasing a special edition DVD/Blu-ray of his 1993 debut feature, *Cronos*.

It's the tale of Jesus Gris (Frederico Luppi), an antique dealer who discovers the rare Cronos device – a golden, scarab-shaped artifact built centuries earlier by an alchemist, which contains a live insect trapped within. The device infects him with a form of vampirism that gradually transforms the kindly grandfather into a ghoulish blood-drinker. Relentlessly pursued by a violent thug, Angel (Ron Perlman), whose wealthy, dying uncle covets the mysterious artifact, he's cared for by the only other person that knows his secret, his mute granddaughter, who hides him away in her toy box. In keeping with del Toro's subsequent tender depictions of children, she sees the monster for who he really is and loves him without question.

Though he wrote *Cronos* while in his early twenties, del Toro wasn't able to bring his vision to the screen for nearly a decade. "I have been obsessed with vampires since I was very young," acknowledges del Toro, 46. "I used to read a lot of treatises on Eastern European vampire lore and I was very interested in reformulating it as a Catholic retelling of the myth. I also was interested in alchemy at the time and I found a lot of striking similarities between the alchemical process and the process of resurrection. So, I started to just jam those three things together."

Like many debut features, *Cronos* set a career path. The obsession with detail, expressive colour schemes, fairy tale imagery and the poetic approach to horror found in 2001's *The Devil's Backbone* (also featuring Luppi) and *Pan's Labyrinth* are evident here, along with the inherent pulpiness and wry humour found in *Blade II* (2002) and *Hellboy* (2004). At its core, *Cronos* is a monster movie, but like almost everything that would follow in del Toro's career, it's not a simple tale of a costumed teen-terrorizer, but of a sympathetic outcast who serves as a painful reflection of human nature.

"I was never interested in doing a regular vampire film," says del Toro of his approach. "I didn't even use the word 'vampire' as the movie was progressing. I was interested in actually having people work *with* the movie. *Cronos* is not for people who like their stories pre-digested. It's a movie that requires a partnership with the audience because it is in the mind of the audience that the word 'vampire' will come out. Never in the film."

Del Toro specifically avoided most of the conventions of the creatures that he had studied for years. He sought to create what he describes as a Third World working-class vampire.

"I was very interested in making this vampire more of a victim or a poor devil vampire rather than a magnificent creature of mythology. I wanted him to sleep in a toy box, be full of self-

**"LIKE IN MOST ANY MOVIE THAT I DO, I WAS TRYING TO MAKE THE MONSTER SYMPATHETIC."** *Guillermo del Toro*



***Uncontrollable Thirst:*** *Jesus (Frederico Luppi) laps up a drop of blood.*

doubt and be really weak. I wanted him to lick the blood from the floor of a bathroom and belong not [to] an aristocratic family in a castle in Eastern Europe but a middle-class family in a middle-class neighbourhood in Mexico City. Like in most any movie that I do, I was trying to make the monster sympathetic."

The contrast of innocent childhood love with sympathetic monsters – an idea del Toro would return to again in *The Devil's Backbone* and *Pan's Labyrinth*, his most critically lauded works – has its roots in his childhood. He grew up with an overbearing religious grandmother who was so terrified by his dark, monster-fuelled imagination that she had him exorcised multiple times as a child. However, he loved her despite this and chose to represent it in the film through the dynamic between Jesus and his ever-doting granddaughter.

"We had a very difficult relationship, but a very loving relationship," recalls del Toro. "My grandmother was the one who instilled the fear of hell in me and all the things that made my childhood unhappy. But, I loved her nevertheless and I thought it was really fascinating how unconditional the love of a child is for his parents or grandparents. How we don't question their flaws. I really wanted to do *Cronos* as a metaphor, where the little girl loves her grandfather blindly."

The filmmaker knew very clearly what the film would be from the beginning, but had a difficult time convincing others that it should be made. One of the major challenges was the fact that, without much of a thriving genre film industry in Mexico at the time he completed the screenplay, there was no company that could achieve the complex effects that were required. His solution was simple: he would simply start his own.

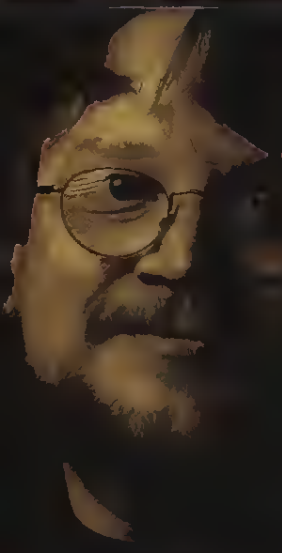
"My wife and I got into a very bad motorcycle accident, and when I was in bed recovering I started sketching and sketching, and then I applied for a makeup course that [Academy Award-winning makeup artist] Dick Smith (*The Exorcist*, *Scanners*) was teaching. I decided after the accident that I was going to create an effects company in order to service *Cronos*, and then immediately after that I was going to close the company," remembers del Toro. "It was an eight-year journey making *Cronos* and part of that journey was the fact that I knew in Mexico at that time, when they read the screenplay, they would ask one question: 'How the hell are you going to make it?' And that answer would be a very easy one if people knew by then that I was a movie makeup technician."

The experience led him to work on the short-lived Mexican horror TV series *Hora Marcada* (1986 - 1989) that would eventually give him his first paying jobs as writer

**Bug Drug:** Jesus feels the euphoric effects of *Cronos*' evil and opposite he first discovers it as his granddaughter looks on

# CREATURES INCOMING!

by STUART F. ARDREWS



**AS ONE OF THE FEW FILMMAKERS TOILING IN THE HOLLYWOOD BIG LEAGUES WITH A GENUINE PASSION FOR THE GENRE, GUILLERMO DEL TORO IS UNDERSTANDABLY A MUCH SOUGHT-AFTER COMMODITY.** In 2008, he placed an enviable slate of dream projects on the back burner to take the reins of an even bigger dream project, the Peter Jackson-produced adaptation of *The Hobbit*. But on May 30 of this year, after two years of intensive pre-production in New Zealand, del Toro announced he was leaving The Shire due to lengthy delays and the fact that the financially struggling MGM had yet to officially greenlight the project.

"It was the most difficult decision I've [made] in my professional life," explains the filmmaker. "But it was the only logical decision for me. It hurts me a lot but I don't have second thoughts about it."

Since returning stateside, del Toro has reignited enough development deals to keep him in the dream project business for many moons to come. *Rue Morgue* asked the prolific filmmaker to clarify exactly where he's at with some of his biggest upcoming projects.

## At the Mountains of Madness

"This is a novel I read when I was very young," he says of the cinematic incarnation of H.P. Lovecraft's classic novella that has been his ultimate dream project for decades. "It's been with me for almost 30 years. I co-wrote [the script] with Matthew Robbins (*Mimic*, *Dragonslayer*) fourteen years ago and I hope to get it made."




Del Toro is currently designing the film and getting ready to present it to Universal for the official go-ahead.

"I can not get into specifics, but we're doing some stuff that is really cool with the creatures that has never been done before in film," he promises. "As I learned on *The Hobbit*, nothing is sure until you get the greenlight."

However, with James Cameron producing and plans to shoot in 3-D, this one seems very likely.



**"I REALLY WANTED TO DO CRONOS AS A METAPHOR WHERE THE LITTLE GIRL LOVES HER GRANDFATHER BLINDLY."** *Guillermo del Toro*

and director – all while he continued to work on *Cronos*. The show was a breeding ground for Mexican filmmaking talent and would serve as a rite of passage for such illustrious figures as *Children of Men* director Alfonso Cuaron and cinematographer Guillermo Navarro, who would shoot *Cronos* and win an Oscar for his cinematography on *Pan's Labyrinth*. Though embarrassed by some of the material now ("They are really bad because they were made by very young people with very limited resources."), del Toro cherishes tha experience and the creative relationships that he took from the series into *Cronos* and the rest of his career.

"It was a huge learning ground for us," he points out. "It is my hope somaday to produce a horror anthology TV series, more than anything to be able to shepherd young filmmakers and give them a similar opportunity."

After years spant establishing himself with effects work, short films, and his experience on *Hora Marcada*, del Toro was finally able to put *Cronos* in production. But not without further difficulty.

"It was actually the second most expensive Mexican movie back then, after *Like Water for Chocolate*. I think even now [*Cronos* is] the most expensive horror movie ever made in Mexico," says del Toro. "It was almost impossible to make this movie. Almost everybody in the Mexican film establishment didn't like the script, but there were also a few very strong supporters of it. It was a battle of many years to get it past the people in the Mexican Institute of Film who really resisted the idea and saw no future in the movie."

When del Toro finally got everything into place to make the film, there was a whole new set of challenges. One of the major ones was to design and create the Cronos device – a prop which needed to be instantly iconic. Fortunately, the filmmaker was able to find several capable craftsmen to bring his blueprints to life.

***RUE MORGUE* CHECKS IN ON GUILLERMO DEL TORO ON THE STATUS OF HIS MANY UPCOMING FILMS.**



### THE HAUNTED MANSION

Del Toro announced in July that he was developing another big-screen adaptation of the classic Disneyland haunted house attraction. (The 2003 version starring Eddie Murphy was a critcal disaster.) Del Toro visited the mansion the year it opened in 1969 (at the tender age of four) and has returned almost every year since.

"I turned in the storyline to Disney a few weeks ago," he says. "We are doing a revision and then I'm going to go on writing it with Matthew Robbins. It will be ready to present to Disney with maquettes, models, designs and a screenplay in January. But by that time, Cthulhu willing, I will already be in prep of *Mountains* firmly."

### FRANKENSTEIN

One of the many Universal projects del Toro shelved when he began his descent into Middle Earth was a retelling of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Pre-production began over three years ago with concept designs by comic book legend Bernie Wrightson (*Swamp Thing*) and with Doug Jones (*Hellboy*, *Pan's Labyrinth*) set to star as the monster. But with *Mountains* likely to be greenlit, *Frankenstein* stays on the back burner for now.

"Universal is kind enough to be holding *Frankenstein*, *Slaughter House Five* and *Jekyll and Hyde* for me, so I'll get to them eventually but it's not a short-term project right now," he says.

### TROLLHUNTERS

In 2007, del Toro announced the launch of his own label at Disney titled Double Dare You with a slate of animated films beginning with *Trollhunters*. However, a management change at Disney saw the project land at Dreamworks.

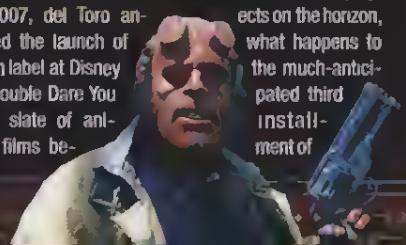
"I dedicate one or two days a week to Dreamworks to launch my first animation venture as director," he says, describing the Dreamworks campus as a "creative paradise."

### HELLBOY 3

So with all of these projects on the horizon, what happens to the much-anticipated third installment of Big Red's misadventures?

"I think that Ron Perlman is very reluctant to do it again because of the six-to seven-hour makeup jobs," del Toro explains. "But a website called Den of Geek started a petition and it really meant a lot to Ron that people were signing it. You know, he's not invulnerable to the charms of fandom [laughs] and I would love nothing more than to finish that story. But without Ron, there is no Hellboy."

To help persuade Mr. Perlman to commit to *Hellboy 3*, sign the petition at ipetitions.com/petition/hellboy3.





**"I LOVED WATCHING HIM BECAUSE HE WAS LIKE A THROWBACK TO AN OLD-FASHIONED, TOUGH LEADING MAN LIKE LEE MARVIN. HE WAS A VERY BRUTISH PRESENCE, BUT ALSO A REALLY DELICATE ACTOR."** *Guillermo del Toro* **ON RON PERLMAN**

"We got the design from a very good friend of mine, a painter called Jose Fors," says del Toro. "He designed the exterior of the device. I designed the interior and the lower part of it. Then we hired a jeweller to sculpt the device in wax like a real jewel. We sculpted the interior and the insect's tail, and my father-in-law mechanized the whole thing. He was the mechanical engineer for all the devices and the interior of the device – the insect's tale, all of them. I designed the mechanisms, but he would create them."

The iconic infernal machine – featured in *Hellboy* creator Mike Mignola's artwork for the Criterion cover – was a beautiful piece of design that also proved to be surprisingly functional as a prop. (It would also be echoed in a few of the props in *Hellboy II*.)

"The idea came from when I was a kid, I remember seeing women wearing what at the time was called 'living jewellery.' They were beetles, very beautiful, metallic iridescent beetles, living ones. They used to screw a gold waistband around the insect and wear it on their chest like a moving piece of jewellery. I thought that was incredibly cruel. I've always been fascinated by biology and I always thought that the lyme that creates the disease of sleep [lyme disease] was very interesting because it came from a little insect. So I thought, wouldn't it be interesting if an insect could spread a disease that was like vampirism."

Del Toro also wanted to depict the infection "like a Russian nesting doll," giving it multiple layers of meaning. On the broadest end of the spectrum he wanted to represent the new presence of NAFTA in Mexico as a form of political vampirism.

"It's very subtle; people will never notice now because the movie is in the past. [Since] the movie was done about two years before NAFTA, we set it two years in the future. We got license plates the way they were going to be two years later, all the signage in the streets was in Russian, Chinese, Spanish and many of the dates on the headlines and the calendars were created to be two years later. I wanted to depict that as the biggest form of vampirism, but I also wanted to show all the way down to the smallest form of vampirism, which is the insect inside the device. The insect is also a slave. It's also being exploited."

Though this artistically subtle side can be seen throughout del Toro's work, there were also seeds of his pulpier, comic book-style narratives (the aforementioned *Blade II* and *Hellboy* series). Specifically, the filmmaker began his working relationship with Ron Perlman, who would go on to star in the director's subsequent comic book adaptations.

CRONOS



"He was always a very interesting character actor," recalls del Toro. "I loved watching him because he was like a throwback to an old-fashioned, tough leading man like Lee Marvin. He was a very brutish presence, but also a really delicate actor. I really liked the way he worked. The two bad guys in *Cronos* were written a little bit cartoony because in American movies the bad Mexican guys are always cartoony and I wanted to have my revenge. I wanted him to play one of them and I met with Ron in Beverly Hills over dinner. He had read the screenplay and was, I think, puzzled by it, but he was definitely intrigued. Over the course of that dinner, I think we struck a friendship and it's a friendship that thrives to this day."

While *Cronos* didn't get much attention in North America beyond landing its creator a very unhappy job with Dimension Films directing *Mimic* (he's talked about doing a director's cut of the 1997 film to restore his original vision), the critical and international filmmaking community welcomed him with open arms. *Cronos* swept the Mexican Academy Awards and landed the prestigious International Critics' Week Prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

Del Toro maintains that his filmmaking style has essentially remained the same, however.

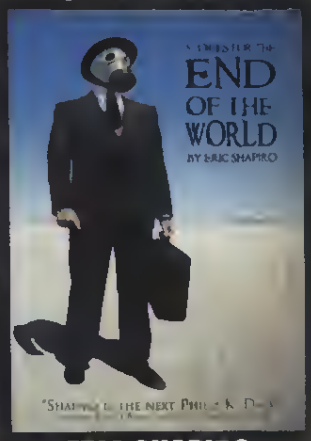
"I approach them now in exactly the same way that I approached *Cronos*," he says. "I think that a B-movie needs to be treated with the love that you would give to an A-feature film and that's one of the reasons why the film was so difficult to make. Obviously, I could have done it as a really low-budget Mexican quickie. But I wanted to make it, by the standards of Mexican film, big and unforgettable."



***Man Or Monster?:*** *Jesus becomes increasingly ghoulish thanks to makeup that recalls Christopher Lee in Hammer's* ***Curse of Frankenstein****, and above) Angel (Ron Perlman) prepares for a fight*

# DESTRUCTIVE FICTION FROM PERMUTED PRESS

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A NEW ART BOOK TRACES THE LEGACY OF HAMMER'S VIBRANT POSTER GRAPHICS.

# STROKES of MIDNIGHT

by SEAN PLUMMER



IT IS PERHAPS THE MOST ICONIC PIECE OF ART ASSOCIATED WITH HAMMER FILMS and remains one of the most collectible horror movie posters ever. Artist Bill Wiggins' painting for Hammer's *Dracula* (a.k.a. *Horror of Dracula*, 1958) features star Christopher Lee leaning in to bite co-star Melissa Stribling's neck, with the overwrought ad copy ("The terrifying lover who died – yet lived!") floating to the left of Lee's menacing features. It's a lurid work, heavy on reds and greens, that was equally elegant and explicit (for the time) – much like the bulk of Hammer's output, which dragged horror kicking and screaming into the blood-drenched colour era from its modest, black and white roots.

It's also just one of nearly 300 Hammer posters featured in Marcus Hearn's *The Art of Hammer: Posters From the Archive of Hammer Films* (out now from Titan Books). Hearn's follow-up to last year's *Hammer Glamour* (*RM#100*), which offered a comprehensive history of the studio's scream queens, features lovingly restored posters from the 1950s through to Hammer's final productions in the 1970s, complete with commentary about their history and the artists who made them.

"The design of many of the 1950s posters accommodates the relatively primitive screen printing process, but there are notable exceptions in the beautiful and detailed posters for films such as *Quatermass 2* and *Dracula*," says Hearn. "The 1960s belong to Tom Chantrell, and in the 1970s there was a move away from the old elegance towards a more lurid style. If you were being uncharitable you could say that the posters reflected the increasing vulgarity of the films from this era."




Other key Hammer artists in the '50s and early '60s included Wiggins (*The Mummy*, *The Curse of the Werewolf*), Renato Fratini (*The Phantom of the Opera*) and John Stockle (*The Revenge of Frankenstein*, *The Terror of the Tongs*, *The Damned*) All were ad men working for the firms handling the accounts of Hammer's various distributors. But it was the late Tom Chantrell ("*the* Hammer poster artist," in Hearn's estimation) who was the company's most prolific illustrator and whose work is now the most collectible He handled all Hammer posters from mid-1965 to mid-1970, his first was for the Ursula Andress vehicle *She* and his last for 1970's *Taste the Blood of Dracula*. (His most famous work, though, likely remains his iconic contribution to the poster campaign for *Star Wars*.)

"Even though Tom painted in a variety of bold and colourful styles, he was remarkably attuned to each film," Hearn notes "With *The Nanny* it was cloying claustrophobia, with *One Million Years B.C.* it was epic adventure, and with *Moon Zero Two* it was cartoon-style science fiction. This is all the more remarkable when you consider that he often didn't even see the films."

Research on *The Art of Hammer* began with Hearn locating the posters While most of the material featured in the oversized coffee-table book came from the studio itself, private collectors were useful in filling the gaps in Hammer's collection. "I knew most of the leading collectors through my work with Hammer over the last fifteen years," says Hearn. "Everyone was very happy to help, and some of the rarest items came from these guys."

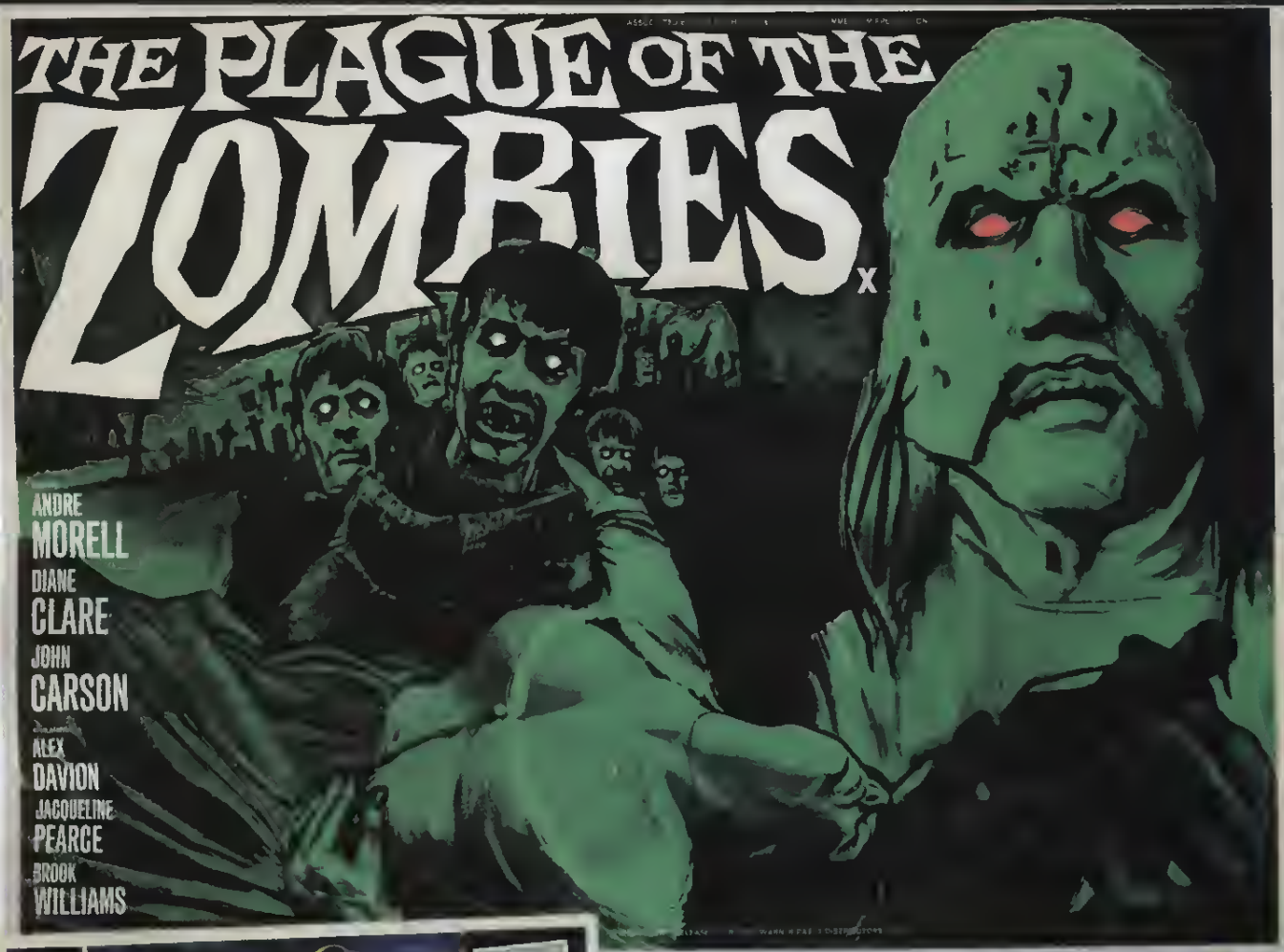



Restoring the posters to pristine condition proved to be a gruelling process, and one which could not have been completed without Hearn's collaborators, Pen Godbold and Steve Reed

"I think we all underestimated the time and effort that would be needed to bring all of the illustrations up to a consistent standard," Hearn says "Not everything came to us in pristine condition, and we worked for nearly a year to remove pinholes, tears and creases, and to correct colour on the most battered posters. Pen has been working with me since the days of Marvel's *Hammer Horror* mag-




***Poster Perfection:*** *(from top)* ***The Curse of the Werewolf*** *(1961) by Bill Wiggins,* ***Dracula*** *(1958) by Wiggins,* ***One Million Years B.C.*** *(1966) by Tom Chantrell, and (opposite)* ***Dracula A.D. 1972*** *by Renato Casaro.*







***Hammer's Hall of Horror:*** *(from top)* ***Plague of the Zombies*** *(1966) by Chantrell, and* ***The Mummy*** *(1959) by Wiggins.*

azine in the mid-1990s. She loves the films, and she's the best digital restoration expert I know. Steve Reed's company, Posters and Stuff, is renowned for its superb reproductions of Hammer quad posters, so although we didn't know each other so well, he was an obvious choice."

Since Hammer is a British company, Hearn wanted to include as many of the British posters as possible, but there are also plenty of American examples, as well as samples from Italy, Belgium, France, Germany, Romania and Japan. Hammer's posters, Hearn notes, were not merely marketing tools, but often invaluable in getting the films made.

"Hammer's managing director James Carreras would often commission poster artwork before he even had a script," Hearn explains. "He regarded the poster as a valuable tool in getting financed. Many of the designs he commissioned at the pre-production stage survived in the finished posters. Where the designs changed, some of the pre-production posters were actually superior. I think that was especially true in the 1970s."

And in at least one instance, a pre-production poster actually helped shape the film's narrative. *The Mummy* star Peter Cushing took a look at Bill Wiggins' poster, which depicted policemen shining a light through a hole in the mummy's torso, and requested that director Terence Fisher add a scene where he thrusts a harpoon through the creature, thus making more sense of the poster.

"I sometimes wonder whether cinema-goers were left slightly baffled by the posters that seemed strangely disconnected from the films," Hearn muses. "For example, the posters for the next two Mummy films – *The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb* and *The Mummy's Shroud* – appeared to show giant mummies on the rampage!"

As Hammer's films were often popular but not critically successful, their related artwork has been somewhat overlooked by film scholars. But Hearn says that fan interest in Hammer poster art has been "consistently high for many years now" and points out that the sheer volume of films Hammer produced (over 200 from the '50s to the '70s) means that there are many posters out there in the marketplace, not all of which are exorbitantly priced.

"At one end of the scale you've got *Dracula*, which fetches over £10,000 [approx. $16,200 USD] on the rare occasions it turns up at auction houses," he says. "At the other end there are some beautiful designs for many classic films, which sell for less than [$162 USD] on eBay. That's the wonderful thing about collecting Hammer posters – it's still relatively inexpensive for any fan to start a collection with some really nice items. Since the recession, it seems to me that the cheaper posters have become cheaper, but the most expensive posters have held their value. It's estimated that there are only around 50 copies of the British quad of *Dracula* in the world. If that's true, I can't imagine them losing their value."

Hammer's reliance on painted poster art faded by the early '70s and was replaced by "crude photo montages," as Hearn calls them. But the studio's four-colour legacy was honoured in 2008 when the Royal Mail released stamps for *The Curse of Frankenstein*, *Dracula* and *The Mummy*. Hearn sees that honour, as well as his own book, as important steps towards the critical rehabilitation of the movie poster as an art form and of Hammer's horror legacy.

"Collectors and dealers have long since recognized the value of those three designs in particular, but this was another step towards the cultural legitimacy that critics denied Hammer in the 1950s and '60s."

Images courtesy of The Art of Hammer (Titan Books)

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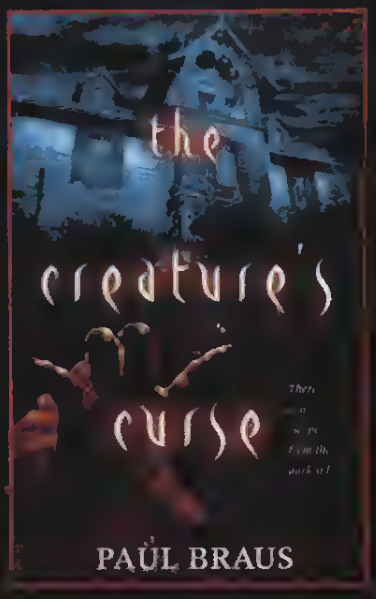



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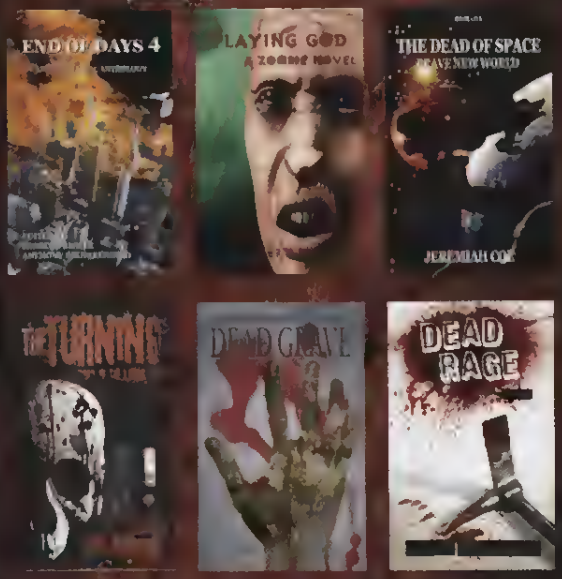
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# AXES AND EYEBALLS

BY APRIL SNELLINGS

NOW THAT GUSSIED-UP EXPLOITATION FLICKS SUCH AS PIRANHA 3D AND MACHETE ARE POPPING UP IN MAINSTREAM MULTIPLEXES, IT'S A PERFECT TIME TO REDISCOVER EERIE PUBLICATIONS. AFTER ALL, THE LURID HORROR MAGAZINES, WITH TITLES SUCH AS TALES FROM THE TOMB, WEIRD AND WITCHES' TALES, WHICH HIT THEIR STRIDE IN THE 1960s AND '70s, ARE ESSENTIALLY GRINDHOUSES BUILT OF CHEAP PAPER AND BLACK INK. OVERSHADOWED BY ADMITTEDLY CLASSIER ACTS SUCH AS SKYWALD'S NIGHTMARE AND JAMES WARREN'S CREEPY AND EERIE MAGAZINES, THE EERIE PUBLICATIONS LINE HAS BEEN ALL BUT FORGOTTEN.




Most of the stories in the Eerie Publications family of titles were simply redrawn versions of previously published horror comics, but with one important innovation: gore by the gallons. Horror comics before the establishment of the Comics Code Authority might have been grisly, but Eerie Pubs went over the top, with graphic depictions of violent death and dismemberment. Since Eerie's output technically fell into the magazine category, it skirted the restrictions of the Code altogether. Vertebrae could be seen tumbling from mangled neck stumps ("House of Monsters" from the January 1970 issue of *Horror Tales*) and bodies were torn apart until nothing was left but "an unrecognizable heap of mutilated flesh and crushed bones lying in a massiva pool of blood" ("Voodoo Terror" from *Terror Tales*, July 1976).

"Violent horror was coming of age at the time and the Eerie Pubs magazines were among the trailblazers," says Mike Howlett, author of *The Weird World of Eerie Publications: Comic Gore that Warped Millions of Young Minds*, out this month from Feral House. "They were the bad boys of comics, much like H.G. Lewis and George Romero were the opposite of Hollywood at the time, breaking the gore taboo."

Eerie Publications developed a winning, if not exactly ethical, formula: pick a story from one of the hundreds of pre-Code horror comics (preferably not EC – too high-profile), photocopy it, and hand it off to an artist to produce a much gorier version. And not just any artist; Eerie hired top-notch talent such as Dick Ayers and Chic Stone to raise the gore quotient for its "remakes."

Many of these artists had lost a lot of income due to the devastating effects of the Comics Code of 1954, so they welcomed the work – even if they were initially uncomfortable with the material.

Ayers, for instance, rejected Eerie's offer at first. During a telephone interview from his White Plains, NY home, the artist, now 86, laughs when he recalls his first meeting with editor Carl Burgos, who worked




**The Sum Of its Parts:** *Two interior pages from "Blood Bath," written and illustrated by Chic Stone, a variety of Eerie Pubs (opposite) one severed heads.*




under the auspices of an umbrella company known as Countrywide Publications. "When he showed me what he wanted me to do – to really make these stories horrible, with [body parts] flying through the air helter-skelter – I said, no, I wouldn't do that. ... Marvel had me doing horror stories, but [what Burgos wanted] was just too much. So he took me into the office of Myron Fass, who was the publisher. Myron sat back and he listened to me say, 'Oh, no, I won't do that; I don't want to go that far.' And he said, 'Look, before you make up your mind, go to the movies tonight and see the one called *The Wild Bunch*.' So I went to see it with my wife, and I came back and said, 'Hey, if they can do that in the movies, I can do it in a comic book.'"

It wasn't long before he was producing some of the most grisly comic art the world had ever seen. He even developed his own trademark Fulci-esque gag; whenever one of Ayers' characters was on the business end of an axe, you could bet that at least one eyeball would come popping out.

"It developed naturally," the legendary artist says. "It just seems like the logical thing to do, to have someone's eyes pop out when they're getting all cut up."

Besides their gored-up art, the stories also received lurid new titles. "I Killed Mary" from Gilmor's *Weird Mysteries* #8 (1954) was rechristened "I Chopped Her Head Off" when Ayers redrew it for a 1975 issue of *Weird*. Eerie did publish a few original stories, as well – most notably "Blood Bath," Chic Stone's gruesome cautionary tale about the dangers of LSD, which apparently causes one to nail severed body parts to the nearest wall. Ayers was happy to have the gig, and had no qualms about reworking the stories. "I never gave that a thought. That was Myron's problem, not mine. I liked them better with the titles that they picked anyway."

For Howlett, like most Eerie Pubs collectors, the gonzo art is what initially attracted him to the magazines. The full-colour covers (interiors were always black and white) were eye-catching; notable images include a woman being

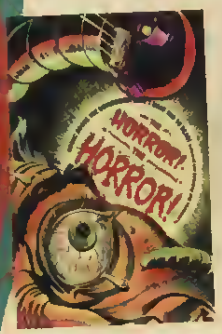
# THE HORROR! THE HORROR!

## COMIC BOOKS THE GOVERNMENT DIDN'T WANT YOU TO READ

**Jim Trombetta**
*Abrams Comicarts*

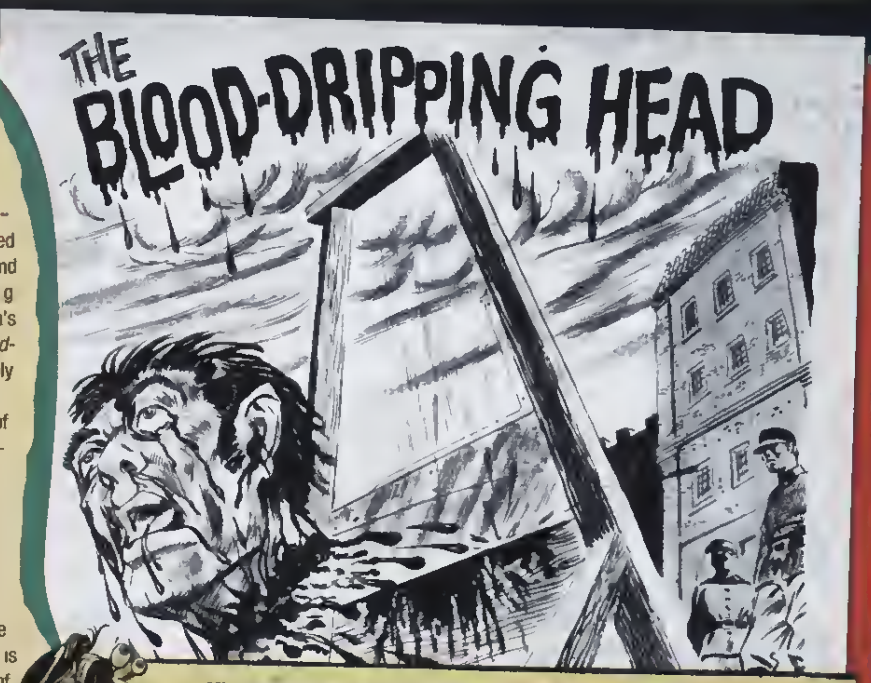
We're in the midst of a horror comics revival, as evidenced by the reissues and remakes of the likes of *Creepy* and *Eerie*, and various books about the lurid pre-Code titles (e.g. *Four Color Fear*, *RM#104*). The latest is Jim Trombetta's *The Horror! The Horror! Comic Books the Government Didn't Want You to Read*, an astounding journey into the incredibly prolific and shockingly graphic genre of ten-cent terrors.

Trombetta structures the 300-page book around a series of essays covering various aspects of horror comics. While detailing the history, and celebrating certain triumphs (such as the psychedelic art of L.B. Cole), he also deciphers the meaning behind the depictions of race, war, women, skeletons, vampires, decapitated heads, even ocular trauma. Though he may be reaching in some places – is that soldier's holster on the cover of *Battle* really meant as a phallic symbol? Are skeletons "a parody of the bodily resurrection promised in the Christian Bible?" Really? – the essays are absolutely fascinating, revealing much about the '50s-era repression these pulp publications dangerously unleashed. For example, he connects Cold War paranoia and the rise of psychiatry to brainwashing narratives in tales such as "The Brain-Bats of Venus."




The author's historical research and attention to detail are exceptional, but even if you don't read a word of Trombetta, *The Horror! The Horror!* contains scores of eye-popping (sometimes literally!) covers and dozens of entire stories. Whether it's the graphically lobotomized monster on the cover of *Weird Mysteries* #5, or the original tale of a vampiric, milkman-like blood collector in "Nightmare Merchant," Trombetta's book delivers a wealth of ghoulish eye candy. If that wasn't enough, it's got an intro from R.L. Stine and a DVD of the 1955 TV documentary *Confidential File* – a *Reefer Madness*-like look into the evils of comic books that'll have you rolling on the floor. Rate this one E, for "Essential."

**DAVE ALEXANDER**




***Minced Meat, Not Words:*** *"The Blood-Dripping Head," which was redrawn by Oscar Fraga from original tale "River of Blood" (from* ***Harvey's Black Cat Mystery*** *#48, Feb 1954), appeared five times in various Eerie publications*

fed alive into a sausage grinder; a giant monster gnawing a woman's flesh from her bones, corn-on-the-cob style; and Frankenstein's Monster using his own severed arm to pound a stake into a vampire's chest (monster smackdowns were an Eerie cover favourite).

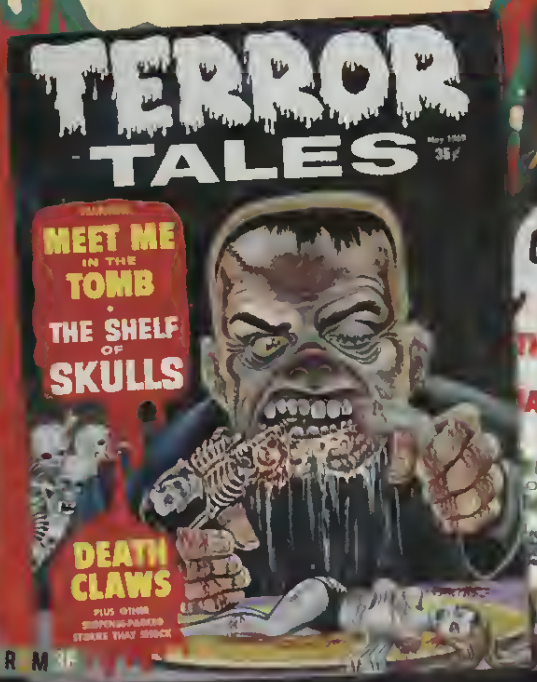
"When I saw Chic Stone's cover for the May 1969 issue of *Weird*, I was floored," Howlett says. "I had somehow missed this one until the mid-'80s. It blew my mind and started a multi-decade obsession. The fact that nothing was known about the people involved with Eerie was another thing that lit my fire. ... Who the hell would publish this audacious shit?"

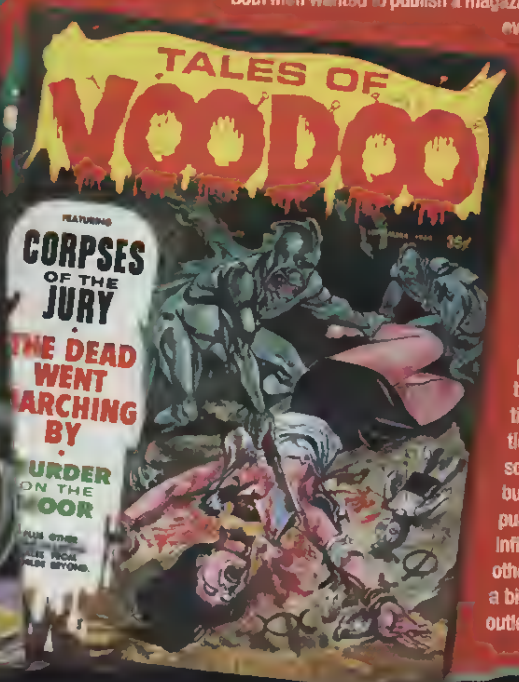
The answer is the aforementioned Fass, Countrywide's prolific and controversial magazine publisher. Horror magazines such as *Tales of Voodoo* and *Terrors of Dracula* were only a fraction of Fass' pulp empire. His New York offices published a huge body of work that covered practically every pop culture touchstone of the era. Magazines such as *Jaws of Blood* and *Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind* rode the coattails of blockbuster movies; rock music inspired craptastic music mags that included *Acid Rock* and *Paul McCartney Dead – The Great Hoax*; and a number of men's magazines with titles such as *Hush-Hush News* were also on the roster.

Remembered for his colourful personality as much as for his work, Fass often confronted editors with a loaded gun strapped to his side, and supposedly once dealt with a business disagreement by beating one of his associates in front of the rest of his employees. At one point, Fass even took on famed horror publisher James Warren in a high-stakes, if less than spectacular, duel.

Both men wanted to publish a magazine called *Eerie*, so it was decided that whoever delivered the mag first would get the title. Both publishers were forced into frantic, all-night production sessions with their respective teams. Warren won, so Fass had to rename his hastily produced magazine. In fact, you can still see unerased pencil marks on the cover of the January 1966 issue of *Weird* magazine – the first title published under the banner of Eerie Publications (the name clearly a stab at Warren).

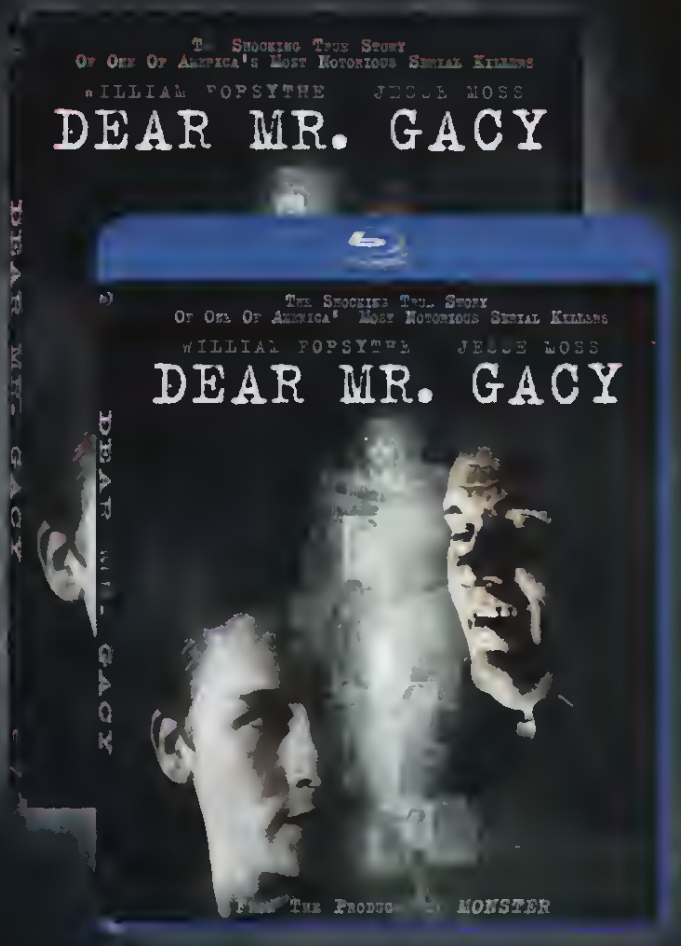
"I admire Fass for what he accomplished, but not necessarily how he accomplished it," says Howlett. "Honestly, when I think of him, I think of a tyrannical, egotistical, boorish man whose quirks and intentions left a bit to be desired. But he taught so many young kids the ins and outs of the business end he gave many people in the publishing industry their start. His magazines influenced many artists, writers, actors and other creative people with tastes that run just a bit left of centre. Even we weirdos need an outlet!"



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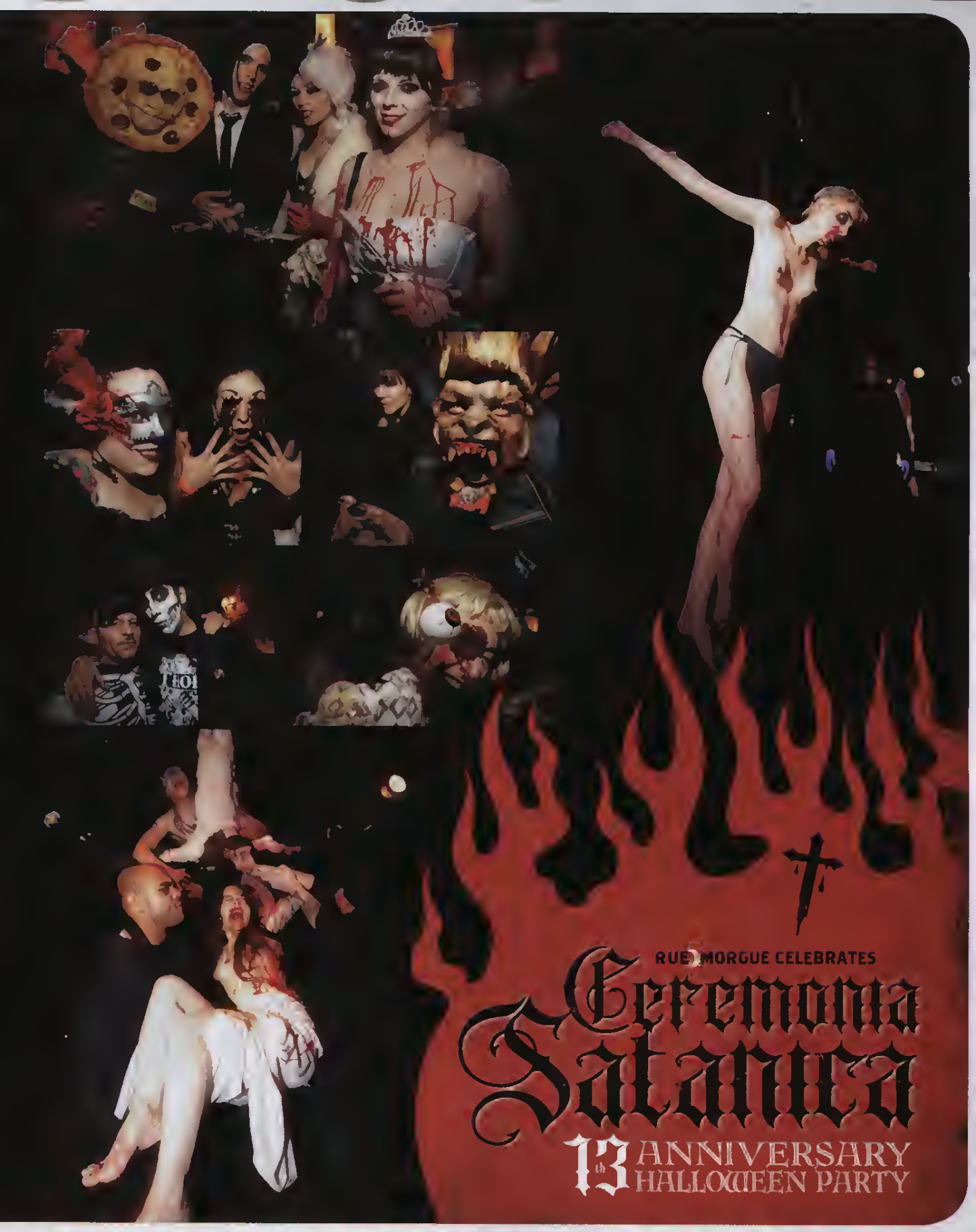
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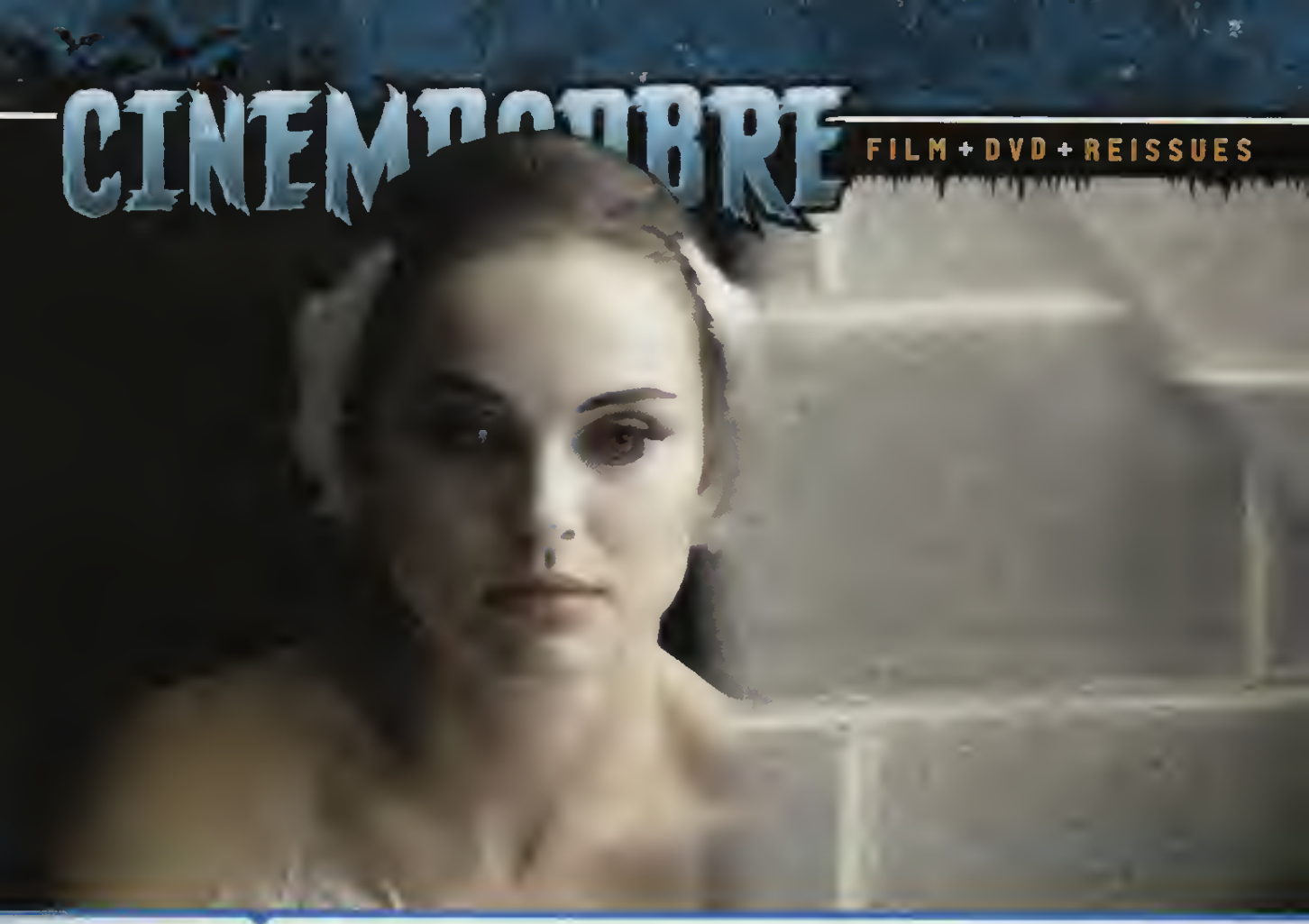
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# CINEMACABRE

FILM + DVD + REISSUES



## LADIES OF THE LAKE

### BLACK SWAN

**Starring Natalie Portman, Vincent Cassel and Mila Kunis**
**Directed by Darren Aronofsky**
**Written by Mark Heyman, Andres Heinz and John J. McLaughlin**
**Fox**

Horror fans don't necessarily know much about ballet's most famous production, *Swan Lake*, which is a good thing because it means *Black Swan* will be that much more of a mindfuck for those unfamiliar with the story's central metamorphosis.

Director Darren Aronofsky (*Requiem for a Dream*, *The Wrestler*) calls the film a psychological thriller, which it most definitely is. Portman's fragile Nina is pushed to her limits when cast as the prima ballerina in *Swan Lake*; as her lecherous company director Thomas (Vincent Cassel) keeps drilling into her, she may be perfect for the innocent White Swan but lacks the passion to play the role's seductive, nasty Black Swan counterpart. Meanwhile, a new girl in the troupe (Mila Kunis' Lily) is a little too perfect for the darker role. The dance between these three spirals into some unsettling places as Nina becomes increasingly bat-shit crazy.




If you think about the art of ballet, this story also works as body horror. The physical punishment self-inflicted on dancers is intense, from pointe shoes that give you deformed, blackened feet with broken bones to eating disorder-causing weight restrictions. This being an Aronofsky film, these types of cruelty are taken in unsuspecting, fantastical directions, with Nina experiencing stigmata and other bodily transformations. What begins slowly as a somewhat straightforward behind-the-scenes look at ballet becomes a violent descent into madness that crescendos with a blood-soaked finale of death that will not disappoint.

A caution: if you hate ballet and/or Natalie Portman, beware that pretty much every scene involves both, with many close-ups of Nina's face making the same wounded bird expression over and over. On the other hand, if you enjoy Portman, you get to see her masturbate and make out with Kunis. Regardless, you also get Barbara Hershey (*The Entity*, *Riding the Bullet*) in a truly terrifying performance as Nina's obsessive mother Erica, the most crazy-scary cinematic matriarch since Carrie White's mom. And if you think you already know the ending, don't forget that Aronofsky is a master of blurring reality and imagination. Breathtaking and beautiful, *Black Swan* is not what it appears, it's much more.

**LIISA LADOUCEUR**

## NIGHT TERRORS

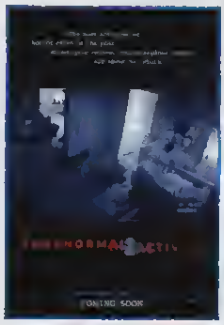
### PARANORMAL ACTIVITY 2

**Starring Sprague Grayden, Brian Boland and Molly Ephraim**
**Directed by Tod Williams**
**Written by Christopher Landon, Michael R. Perry, Tom Pabst, et al.**
**Paramount**

If someone told you ten years ago that one day the biggest horror film at the box office would be shot on hand-held, consumer-level cameras and *never* show the monster, you would've said, "Uh, yeah, it's called *The Blair Witch Project*." But, if they would've told you that the biggest horror film at the box office a decade later would do the same thing but would be set in a suburban house and unfold largely on black and white security camera footage, you would've said, "As if!" and then probably talked about the new season of *Friends* or yelled "Whassup?!?" or something.

Of course, the keepers of the *Blair Witch* franchise buggered it all up with a sequel that inexplicably went the bad teen horror flick route. *Paranormal Activity 2*, however, stays true to the vérité aesthetic of last year's indie blockbuster while expanding on the story as both a sequel and prequel. While the first one focused on the supernatural goings-on connected to suburbanites Katie and Micha, this one's woven around those events and features Katie's sister Kristi (Sprague Grayden), her husband Dan (Brian Boland), stepdaughter Ali (Molly Ephraim) and a toddler

This time the strange noises and things moving around lead the family to install security cameras, there's a family dog that senses something threatening the baby, and we learn more about the sisters' childhood encounter with a ouija board and that something real bad happened to their mom (clearly prequel fodder). It's a slow build – with so many goddamn shots of the automated pool cleaner that it should get a cast credit – but eventually the tension explodes in a white knuckle crescendo.



Director Tod Williams – taking over from series creator Oren Peli, who serves as producer – creates an unsettling rhythm by cycling through the various security cameras. The most powerful elements of *PA2* are actually those wide, static shots that force you to constantly scan the frame. Will the basement door open? Is something moving in the kitchen? Is that a strange shadow on the wall in the next room? Simple but completely anxiety inducing. And, as in the first *PA* (and *Blair Witch*), the characters feel real, so their dread bleeds right through the screen.

The pacing could be tighter, and the intro text dedication about some dead police officers is confusing (there are no cops in the film). But that doesn't matter when even the hair on the back of your neck has goosebumps.

**DAVE ALEXANDER**

## NO MORE GAMES

### SAW 3D

**Starring Tobin Bell, Costas Mandylor and Betsy Russell**
**Directed by Kevin Greutert**
**Written by Patrick Melton and Marcus Dunstan**
**Maple**

So it's come to this. After six inconsistent entries, several of the most perverse kill sequences ever imagined, more plot than the Bible and over $700 million at the box office, the *Saw* franchise brain trust has supposedly decided to call it a day, in 3-D no less. And it seems they've saved the worst for last.




Opening with a scene that sets the tone for the rest of the movie, one of Jigsaw's traps untolds in broad daylight. From the ridiculously complicated nature of the set piece to the horrendous dialogue and worse acting, what seems like a postmodern prank on the audience actually turns out to be the filmmakers playing it straight.

Coming off as a loose summary of the past three films, Hoffman (Costas Mandylor) is still at large and pursuing Jigsaw's wife (Betsy Russell), while he himself is pursued by yet another cop with whom he has a dark past, though we've never seen or heard of him in the previous movies. Meanwhile, a fraudulent Jigsaw survivor named Bobby is placed in the requisite torture porn game where he gets the chance to save several people close to him, though the usual morality angle of the killings is basically ignored.



*Saw 3D: Game over, man*

One gets the sense that there was a collective decision to not try too hard and let the 3-D effects do the heavy lifting. The movie is certainly the most single-mindedly violent of the series in terms of the sheer number of torture devices introduced, but here's the funny part: there's hardly any 3-D. With the exception of the odd piece of projectile flesh confetti, the entire selling point of the film is rarely exploited.

In a desperate attempt to bring some finality to a story that long ago spun out of control, the movie brings back Cary Elwes' character from the original. Unfortunately, it only results in another implausible (and very uncreative) plot line.

The cynic in me won't believe that *Saw 3D* is truly the final chapter because it opened at number one at the box office, yet the optimist in me says there's obviously so little left in the series' tank, this simply has to be the last one.

**AARON VON LUPTON**

## IT'S A MESS, UNCLE WES

### MY SOUL TO TAKE

**Starring Max Thieriot, John Magaro and Jessica Hecht**
**Written and directed by Wes Craven**
**Rogue**

Wes Craven's first feature since the solid 2005 action-thriller *Red Eye* isn't the groan-inducing, cheeseball disaster that rumours, dreadful trailers and the lack of press screenings had collectively led us to expect. It's still pretty bad, though ..

*My Soul to Take* involves an evil entity stalking small-town American teens. Familiar? It would be unfair to accuse Craven of cannibalizing his biggest hits, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and *Scream* (1996), in fact, this film actually has stronger characters than the former and comparatively little of the latter's now-tiresome satirical conceit, and yet it remains grossly inferior to both. Max Thieriot plays Bug, a nerdy teen and member of the Riverton Seven, a group of kids born the night local serial killer The Riverton Ripper died. (Or did he...?). Each year, the kids engage in a ritual intended to keep the Ripper away, but on their collective sixteenth birthday the rite is busted up before it can be completed, where upon a hulking figure gets busy with a big ol' knife. Murders proceed, accusations and red herrings fly, and Bug begins to suspect himself as an unwitting accomplice.




One would be justified in thinking this all sounds like tired teen horror fodder, and yet Craven assiduously avoids most of that subgenre's associated clichés. His strong casting and assuredness as a director are both evident, so what went so terribly wrong?

Clocking in at an hour and 47 minutes, *My Soul to Take* devotes a good twenty minutes to painful expository dialogue, resulting in one of the slowest, talkiest horror films in recent years. Even in the final act, an otherwise exciting climactic scene is ground to a halt by lengthy, awkward exposition. (This also occurred in *Scream*, but in a more entertaining and energetic fashion.) Worse, all the footnotes still don't adequately explain everything. The failings don't end there, despite the film's largely non-satirical tone, the local high school seems to exist in some campy netherworld where *Heathers* and *Rock 'N' Roll High School* overlap, and the post-production 3-D processing is so unspectacular that if it weren't for the eye strain, you'd barely notice it. With a talented cast and one of the biggest names in horror in charge, it's impossible to dismiss *My Soul to Take* as just another throwaway chunk of

# BLOOD ON A BUDGET

## INDIE AND D.I.Y. FILMS REVIEWED



### THE RESURRECTION GAME

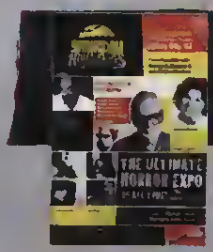
**Mike Watt**
happycloudpictures.com/resgame.php

Zombies have long been a popular go-to monster, but with the recently reissued *The Resurrection Game* (2001), writer/director Mike Watt tries to do something a little different with the gut-munchers.

The story: an alcoholic ex-cop, a former scientist and two "zombie exterminators" – one of whom also happens to be a dominatrix nun – attempt to discover a cure and an explanation for a global "zombie infestation," which may be linked to the secret bio-medical experiments of a sinister conglomerate.

Shot over the course of three years in George A. Romero's former stomping grounds of Pittsburgh, this no-budget horror-comedy adds a few twists to the genre with such elements as clones and cybernetically enhanced undead. But it's hampered by amateurish acting, grainy home-video camera work, crappy sound and an overly complicated plot. Still, in a way, the film retains a certain nerdy appeal because of its earnest, mullet-sporting cast, over-the-top gore gags and outlandish sense of humour (a green-skinned, wisecracking zombie puppet host named Necro-Phil is a definite highlight), making it something that fans of D.I.Y flicks might dig like grave dirt.

JAMES BURRELL



### SATURDAY NIGHTMARES: THE ULTIMATE HORROR EXPO OF ALL TIME!

**Michael Stever**
saturdaynightmaresthemovie.com

Though horror conventions have become increasingly popular, there are surprisingly few documentaries that explore the subject matter. One program to go this route is the new indie release, *Saturday Nightmares: The Ultimate Horror Expo of All Time!*

Shot during a George A. Romero tribute in New Jersey this past March, this 50-minute program includes excerpts from a panel discussion with the iconic director and guests Adrienne Barbeau (*Creepshow*), FX guru Tom Savini and Joe Pilato (*Day of the Dead*), a brief tour of the event's unusual venue: the opulent Landmark Loew's Theatre, a Q&A with Ken Foree (*Dawn of the Dead*), a costume contest and brief interviews with Barbeau, John Amplas (*Martin*) and filmmaker Roy Frumkes (*Document of the Dead*).

While fun and fairly entertaining, the program doesn't go as in-depth as it could. Aside from only moderately informative interviews, there's little or no content with the event's other guests, such as composer Harry Manfredini (*House*) and actor Bill Hinzman (*Night of the Living Dead*). It also suffers from poor audio and lighting, plus too much footage of costumed conventioneers. "Ultimate," you say? Hardly.

JAMES BURRELL

stale Hollywood cheese. But it's entirely justifiable to lament the yawning chasm between what was delivered and what might have been.

JOHN W. BOWEN

## NOT SO SUPER, DARIO

### GIALLO

**Starring Adrien Brody, Emmanuelle Seigner and Elsa Pataky**
**Directed by Dario Argento**
**Written by Jim Agnew and Sean Keller**
**Maya**




Arriving unceremoniously on a bare-bones DVD is Dario Argento's most recent film, an ignominious end for a production that was troubled from the beginning. Ray Liotta, Asia Argento and Vincent Gallo were originally announced as the leads, but were inexplicably replaced by Adrien Brody and Emmanuelle Seigner. Brody, also credited as an executive producer, did double duty as the killer under the anagrammatic pseudonym Byron Deidra. When *RM* spoke to Argento weeks before production began, he lamented that *Giallo* would even be made, stating, "It's impossible to say something about this. The cast changes, then they change the producer. It's an American production. I'm not so sure about this film." And the day before the DVD release, Brody filed a lawsuit against the film's fourteen producers(!), claiming he hadn't been paid. (Note that Argento is not among them.)

Also, the ill-received *Giallo* is not actually a *giallo* – the name given to the Italian murder mystery genre that made Argento famous. Rather it's a police procedural written by two novice screenwriters. Brody stars as a shady, lone-wolf FBI agent investigating a series of brutal torture-murders of attractive young women who is joined by the sister (Seigner) of the killer's latest captive. It becomes a race against time to save her from his clutches.

Diehard Argento fans are dismissing this film and claiming Argento has "lost it." That's not necessarily fair as this isn't an "Argento film," it's a work-for-hire project designed to capitalize on his name and reputation. Nor is it a halfway bad film, as many online reviews would have you believe. The cinematography and locations are elegant, the soundtrack grandly orchestral, the set designs solid and the gore effects – by long-time Argento collaborator Sergio Stivaletti – suitably juicy. The problem is that the film is formulaic, and the script's a collection of Argento clichés. It's not as if Argento has forgotten how to make a film, he likely did the best he could with what he had to work with. The result is a handsome but perfunctory thriller.

THE GORE-MET

## NO MATTER SPLATTER

### VAMPIRE GIRL VS. FRANKENSTEIN GIRL

**Starring Yukie Kawamura, Takumi Saitô and Eri Otoguro**
**Directed by Yoshihiro Nishimura and Naoyuki Tomomatsu**
**Written by Naoyuki Tomomatsu and Shungiku Uchida**
**FUNimation**



If you couldn't make it through Yoshihiro Nishimura's *Tokyo Gore Police* (2008) – as deliciously splattered with goo as it was – you can save yourself the trouble of attempting to wrap your head around his subsequent feature-length gorefest, *Vampire Girl vs. Frankenstein Girl*. Basing the film on the titular manga by Shungiku Uchida, Nishimura teams up with director Naoyuki Tomomatsu (*Zombie Self-Defense Force*) to unleash copious amounts of ultra-violence and commit unspeakable atrocities using deplorable CGI.

The plot's ultimate goal, go figure, is to set up an epic battle between Vampire Girl and Frankenstein Girl. When Monami, a.k.a. Vampire Girl (Yukie Kawamura), transfers to a new school, she crushes hard on Jyugon (Takumi Saitô) and offers him a chocolate containing her own blood. Jyugon eats the chocolate, which both turns him into a half-vampire and totally pisses off his girlfriend, Keiko (Eri Otoguro). Keiko confronts Vampire Girl with fatal results. Fortunately for Keiko, earlier that day her father (also the school's vice principal and kabuki-clad mad scientist) discovered the missing ingredient to his experiments,

allowing him to bring his daughter back to life for a chance at revenge.

As twisted as that love triangle is, even more running time is spent explaining minor details meant to tie the film together, such as who FG gets her limbs from and how VG got her cloak. All these unsolicited questions are answered in the scenes leading up to the über-long final duel – disappointing overall, despite some laughs. Nishimura continues to explore and satirize the same themes in Japanese pop culture that were prevalent in *Tokyo Gore Police* (i.e. *ganguro* – Japanese black-face) but where he once relied on more subtle means, his approach with *VG vs. FG* is blunt and overblown, making for some of the most unforgivable and unnecessary scenes in the whole movie (i.e. repetitive wrist-cutting sequences). Skip this and wait for the next one by this crew, or watch *Mutant Girls Squad* instead.

**JESSA SOBCZUK**



*Lost Boys: The Thirst:* *Close as a Blade?*

## FROGS COME TO HELLTOWN

### LOST BOYS: THE THIRST

**Starring Corey Feldman, Casey B. Dolan and Tanit Phoenix**
**Directed by Dario Piana**
**Written by Evan Charnov and Hans Rodionoff**
**Warner**




Direct-to-disc titles can be tricky to review because it's almost a given that if they'd been good they would've been selected for theatrical release instead of a one-way trip into the Walmart discount bin. But there's a sizeable gap between decent and deplorable, and *Lost Boys* fans will be relieved that unlike the first sequel, 2008's *The Tribe*, *The Thirst* won't make you want to hurl it at the wall, set it on fire or feed it to a goat.

The dated rave-centric plot (teens still attend illegal raves?) gets rolling when the brother of a vampire novelist (Tanit Phoenix cast as a Stephenie Meyer look-alike) gets kidnapped by bloodsuckers and she seeks out vampire hunter Edgar Frog. Initially he refuses but soon finds he can't resist the allure of the stake, especially when evidence of a bigger bloodsucker conspiracy surfaces. It seems the vampires are creating an undead army by giving vamp blood to ravers at parties worldwide, and the ultimate head bloodsucker may be behind it.

The choice to keep the characters and action cartoonish lends itself well to the dumb, disposable fun on tap here. Also, Feldman has mostly abandoned that laughable, forced-sounding gruff voice he put on for *The Tribe*. The twist at the end isn't painfully obvious and there's plenty of vampire disintegration gore to keep things appropriately red and sticky.

But there are hiccups. The box cover suggests that "The Frog Brothers are back for blood." Not quite true. While Alan Frog (Jamison Newlander) plays a pivotal role, Edgar does most of his vamp hunting with other characters. The genre commentary is tired and obvious (the jabs at *Twilight* for instance) and the horror name-checking (including a call out to Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*) is equally unnecessary. It would have been more interesting to learn more about Edgar's adventures over the years and why he now wants out of the slaying business so badly.

*The Thirst* bests *The Tribe* because it doesn't simply rehash the plot of the 1987 film with more gore, sex and bad acting, but tries to expand the mythos. While *The Lost Boys* certainly never needed a sequel, let alone two, this isn't the one you'll want to stake.

**MONICA S. KUEBLER**

## FLACCID, REALLY...

### LAKE PLACID 3

**Starring Colin Ferguson, Yancy Butler and Michael Ironside**
**Directed by G.E. Furst**
**Written by David Reed**
**Sony**

How is it that I've gone this long without watching a SyFy channel movie? Having read so many scathing reviews of their products in these pages, I suppose it was only a matter of time until I encountered one of their low-budget, poorly written boondoggles with bad CGI for myself. And *Lake Placid 3* certainly qualifies in all three of those categories.

The original *Lake Placid* (1999), about a pair of giant crocodiles terrorizing Maine's Lake Black, was a mildly amusing rip-off of *Piranha* (itself a *Jaws* rip-off), which benefitted greatly from a talented cast (Bill Pullman, Bridget Fonda and Oliver Platt among them) and a strong sense of humour. The Bulgarian-filmed 2007 sequel, also produced for SyFy, earned a 3.0 out of 10 on the IMDb, and starred former *Dukes of Hazzard* heartthrob John Schneider. Enough said. This second sequel, also shot in Bulgaria, applies considerably less pounds per square inch in its bite than its predecessors.




Thomas Jane wannabe Colin Ferguson stars as Nathan, a zoologist whose Aunt Sadie was the woman feeding the crocs in *Lake Placid 2* (leading to mayhem). He's investigating a series of mysterious elk deaths near the lake, a situation which may have something to do with his lonely young son secretly feeding the creatures. Much CGI-enhanced croc chomping ensues as Nathan attempts to protect his family, while a quartet of college students tests the

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# OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

## THIS ISSUE: LANCE BITES OFF MORE THAN HE CAN CHEW

### ALL THUMBS



### TERROR OVERLOAD

**Big Bite Entertainment**

I had never heard of Big Bite Entertainment – a distribution label specializing in indie horror films – before a bunch of their titles were foisted upon me. Randomly picking three to review, I thought I'd start with the worst-sounding one. *Terror Overload* is a three-film anthology with a wraparound story about a Twinkie-munching trucker trying to scare the pants off of a sexy hitchhiker by recounting spooky stories. The trucker's anecdotes deal with cannibalism, rape and murder, and there's even a quirky tale about a Chupacabra-esqua creature that feeds on the inhabitants of a backwoods brothel. Though it boasts gratuitous nudity and half-decent gore, it suffers from shitty sound quality, amateurish acting and an approach that's more funny than frightening.

**BODY COUNT:** 11

**BEST DEATH:** Cock-munched by Chupacabra

### NICK FIT




### VINDICATION

**Big Bite Entertainment**

Nicolas' life is an epic failure. His mother is dead, his father hates him, he can't pay the rent and, to top it all off, he can't even commit suicide properly. *Vindication* is a twisted psychological horror film that's occasionally hard to follow as Nicolas rebounds from his failed suicide attempt and tries to come to grips with his overwhelming sense of guilt. He inevitably loses the battle with his inner demons, culminating in a brutal slaughter at a rave where he slices and dices an entire gaggle of party-goers. Though it suffers from lengthy exposition and sub-par camera work, it features a stellar cast, especially star Keith Fraser, whose performance successfully depicts a man straddling the line between delusional schizophrenic and psychopathic serial killer.

**BODY COUNT:** 31

**BEST DEATH:** Guy garrotted with barbed wire

### PO' EDGAR




### AEGRI SOMNIA

**Big Bite Entertainment**

Saving the best for last, *Aegri Somnia* (Latin for "a sick man's dreams") is the bleak portrayal of Edgar, a quiet milquetoast who lives a life of predictable monotony and drab ennui as he tries to come to terms with his wife's unexpected suicide. Seamlessly blending elements from German expressionism and 1940s film noir, this visually haunting pastiche is reminiscant of films such as *Eraserhead*, *Jacob's Ladder* and *Dark City*. Shot predominantly in black and white, *Aegri Somnia* has a disquieting and disorienting feel to it that envelops the viewer as Edgar wrestles with his overpowering desire for isolation and seclusion. But it's filmmaker James Rewucki's evocative direction and actor Tyhr Trubiak's masterful performance as Edgar that makes his ordeal terrifyingly real. This one's destined for cult status.

**BODY COUNT:** 4

**BEST DEATH:** Slob slaughtered with a screwdriver

**LAST CHANCE LANCE**



waters and a disgraced hunting guide (Yancy Butler: TV's *Witchblade*) leads her clients into the danger zone.

The "unrated" version of this film, which SyFy broadcast this past August, no doubt amounts to a couple of harmless nude scenes and some extra violence. On that note, the reptiles are completely CG, reducing their menace to that of guppies.

First-time director G.E. Furst (the new Alan Smithee perhaps?) shows little talent, relying on conventional TV set-ups, amateurish (or, in Michael Ironside's case, uninspired) actors and heavy dialogue scenes in place of compelling action. Consider the *Lake Placid* franchise to be officially toothless.

**SEAN PLUMMER**

## BAD MUTHA TUCKERS

### TICKED-OFF TRANNIES WITH KNIVES

**Starring Krystal Summers, Kelexis Davenport and Tom Zembrod**
**Written and directed by Israel Luna**
**Breaking Glass Pictures**

With its implicit promise of torture and gore, the revenge fantasy genre clearly appeals to horror sensibilities (e.g. *I Spit On Your Grave*). It makes sense, then, that *Ticked-Off Trannies* has been an official selection of the Tellunde Horror Show and other genre showcases. As the title implies, it also aims for retro-camp, and it definitely generates some nostalgic thrills. We get garish lighting, colourful, expressive characters and an overall vibe that recalls John Waters, blaxploitation and other '70s influences.




Of course the neo-grindhouse movement gained traction with the work of Quentin Tarantino, and director Israel Luna's adulation of the Big Q is evident throughout. The same "missing reels" gimmick is employed as in Tarantino's *Grindhouse*, and there are nods at specific sequences from his *Kill Bill*. Though we're tempted to forgive Luna's slow, *Death Proof*-like build-up, unfortunately there's not much pay-off for wading through all the dialogue, as diverting as it can be. Like *Death Proof*, *TOTWK* is an homage to exploitation flicks that doesn't seem to get the point of exploitation flicks.

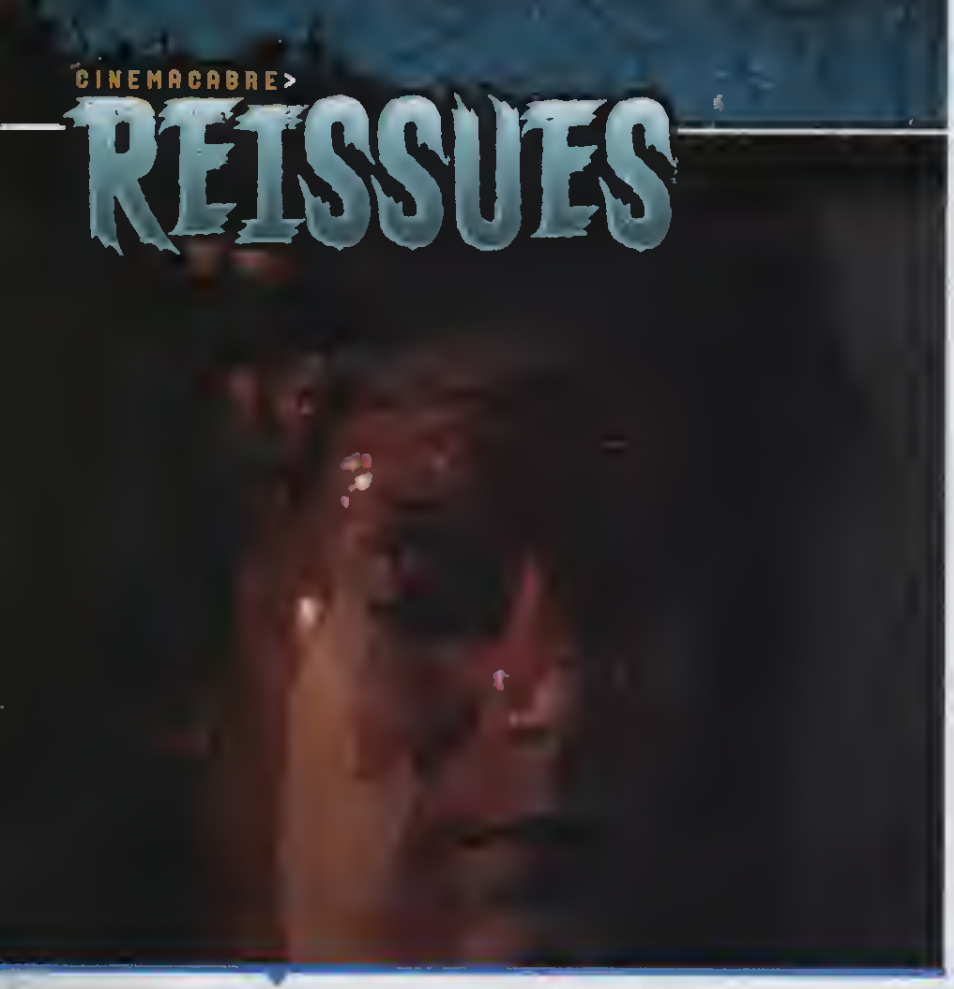
When a straight dude (an entertaining Tom Zembrod) feels deceived by one of the title characters, he recruits some buddies and proceeds to do some damage with a baseball bat. Much later, the gals exact their revenge, with a couple of plot reversals thrown in for good measure. However, both gore and action are minimal, the pacing bogs down amid hit-and-miss comedic bits, and the visceral charge that marks both exploitation and horror is sorely lacking. In fact, there aren't even any knives until the climactic scene, and even then, not all are shown onscreen. Instead, there's just a lot of talk about the horrible things the characters will do to each other. But if simply talking about violence was sufficient, one could read reviews instead of actually going to the movies.

Attracting protest from the transgender community earlier this year, *TOTWK* actually does offend in one respect. Despite all its naughty conversation, the movie is strikingly chaste, turning its engaging cast into glammed-up but sexless Barbie dolls. I'd be ticked-off, too – being slagged because you duct tape your genitals is one thing. Being neutered by an auteur is another.

**PETER GUTIERREZ**


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# REISSUES



## IN LUSTIG WE TRUST

### MANIAC
### 30th ANNIVERSARY EDITION (1980) Blu-ray

**Starring Joe Spinell, Caroline Munro and Abigail Clayton**
**Directed by William Lustig**
**Written by C.A. Rosenberg and Joe Spinell**
**Blue Underground**

It's hard to believe that this 42nd St. classic is 30 years old. It was one of those films on VHS that kids would lower their voices when speaking about. "Have you seen *Maniac*? It's so gross!"

Joe Spinell, a popular character actor who had appeared in such notable '70s films as *The Godfather* and *Rocky*, conceived *Maniac* as a star vehicle for himself. He modelled his sweaty, gibbering Frank Zito on real-life serial killers, as opposed to the unstoppable murder machines raking in big box office bucks in *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th*. He also enlisted the aid of former Hammer lovely and Bond girl Caroline Munro as his fashion photographer love interest Anna, after the original lead, Dario Argento's ex-wife Daria Nicolodi, was forced to drop out. Frank woos Anna when he's not slashing and scalping women, which is rendered in grisly detail by FX maestro Tom Savini.




Director William Lustig, who now runs Blue Underground, has gone all out for this new edition. The film, available in both a two-disc DVD set and as a Blu-ray, features a new 2K High Definition transfer, 6.1 DTS soundtrack and all of the extras from the previous 2001 Anchor Bay and 2007 Blue Underground DVDs. Plus there are four new ten-minute featurettes (Munro, Savini and composer Jay Chattaway reminisce about working on the film) and an offbeat meeting between Lustig and songwriters Michael Sambello and Dennis Matkosky to discuss the true origin of the monster 1983 hit single "Maniac." Lustig also participates in a new commentary track with producer Andrew Garrone. And that's just the first disc...

The second disc contains the previously released documentary *The Joe Spinell Story*, and two utterly fascinating sections of vintage video clips *Maniac Publicity* features various clips of Munro, Spinell and Lustig promoting the film, including an entire New York cable access show featuring Lustig. *Maniac Controversy* offers a host of contemporary television news reports about women's groups protesting the violence in the film, as well as a couple of news-magazine segments about the then-new wave of gore films. Look for an Easter egg on each disc as well.

Shot on 16mm using available light, this is as good as *Maniac* will likely ever look. The only thing keeping this from being the ultimate definitive edition is the absence of the soundtrack CD shaped like Spinell's head that was in the Anchor Bay tin. Still kicking myself for not picking that up...

**THE GORE-MET**

## THE BLU WITCH PROJECT

### THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT (1999) Blu-ray

**Starring Heather Donahue, Michael Williams and Joshua Leonard**
**Written and directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez**
**Lionsgate**

While the premise of *The Blair Witch Project* – found footage that shows what horrible, witch-related things can happen to three kids who get lost in the woods – has been fairly compared to *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez' film was really its own kind of beast, mostly because of their decision to have the footage reflect "reality" as much as possible, free of special effects or any overtly spookshow shenanigans. Despite its box office success and the many knock-offs and parodies it spawned, the film has also suffered its share of criticism, yet its impact on the overall film landscape is undeniable. (Think the reality-style of *[REC]*, *Cloverfield* and *Paranormal Activity* for starters.)

This brings us to its Blu-ray premiere. Surely such an important film belongs on the shelf of every horror fan, but is it worth an upgrade from standard DVD, considering the entire point of the movie was to not look professional? The short answer is no, and for obvious reasons. The original look and sound of the movie is recreated here and nothing more. (Similarly, the DTS Audio 2.0 mix doesn't add anything new.)



As for the extras, they are almost entirely pulled from the 1999 DVD release: you get a producer/director commentary, a meaningless deleted scene, *Curse of the Blair Witch* (the mockumentary that aired on the Sci-Fi channel to promote the film and flesh out the witch mythology), trailers and *The Blair Witch Legacy*, which is just a brief series of texts set to music giving more background on the "legend." The only new extra is a series of alternate endings, which simply reinforce that the one used was the correct choice.

Given that ten years has passed since its release, it would have been nice to have a new retrospective, examining the impact of the film on the genre and industry today. It's known as one of the most frightening movies of all time for a reason. As for this Blu-ray, meh, it can just stay lost in the woods.

**AARON VON LUPTON**

## DOUBLE YOUR PLEASURE, DOUBLE YOUR DUMB

### THE TERROR WITHIN (1989) DVD

**Starring Andrew Stevens, Starr Andreff and George Kennedy**
**Directed by Thierry Notz**
**Written by Thomas McKelvey Cleaver**

### DEAD SPACE (1990)

**Starring Marc Singer, Laura Mae Tate and Bryan Cranston**
**Directed by Fred Gallo**
**Written by Catherine Cyran**
**Shout! Factory**



*Crucible Of Terror: Victor Clare (Mike Raven) prepares to pour a new mould.*

In the early 1980s, Roger Corman's New World Pictures built a thriving mini industry out of borrowing, homaging and outright ripping off Ridley Scott's classic *Alien* – at least when they weren't doing the same thing with *Jaws* and *Star Wars*. Purveyors of fine cinematic cheese still regard this as a significant time in the history of sci-fi/horror exploitation, an era justly celebrated this year with deluxe special editions of previously impossible-to-find titles such as *Galaxy of Terror* and *Forbidden World* (both in *RM#102*) by Shout! Factory, a company rapidly establishing itself as the Criterion Collection of *le fromage épique*.




Less significant are this pair of late-arriving clones, deftly packaged as a themed double-feature. *Massacre at Central High*'s Andrew Stevens (presumably on a break between Shannon Tweed erotic thrillers) stars in 1989's *The Terror Within*, joining George Kennedy and *The Nest*'s Terri Treas in a subterranean base after an ill-defined plague wipes out most of humanity. Their discovery of a pregnant survivor takes a gruesome turn when she delivers a toothsome, rapidly growing monster. Sooner than you can say, "Holy shit! It's in the air vent!" someone in the movie actually says, "Holy shit! It's in the air vent!"

Despite the Earthbound (read: cheaper) setting, this is possibly the most blatant of all Corman's *Alien* replicants, aping its structure beat for beat (with a dose of *Humanoids From the Deep*'s monster-on-hot chick reproductive cycle thrown in for sleazy measure). It stops briefly to swipe some elements from *Aliens* surprisingly late in the game before veering sharply *Predator*-wards for its climax.

Next, 1990's *Dead Space* takes the rip-off model a step further; not only is it a remake (albeit unacknowledged) of *Forbidden World* with *V* vet Marc Singer in the Jesse Vint role, it actually re-recycles the same footage from *Battle Beyond the Stars* that *FW* also lifted. Marginally slicker than its inspiration but nowhere near as much fun (i.e. less female nudity), *Dead Space* feels much longer than its 72-minute running time.

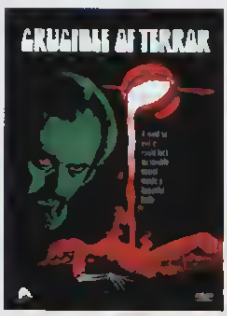
The films can be watched separately, but Shout! Factory has provided an optional "Grindhouse Experience" selection, which sets an appropriate tone by presenting them as one double feature, complete with pre-show and intermission bumpers and trailers for other releases in the Corman Cult Classics line. It's an A+ presentation that helps compensate for the B- quality of the features themselves. The only thing missing is the stale popcorn and the creepy smelly guy sitting two rows behind you.

JOSEPH O'BRIEN

## GENTLEMEN PREFER BRONZE

### CRUCIBLE OF TERROR (1971) DVD

**Starring Mike Raven, Mary Maude and James Bolam**
**Directed by Ted Hooker**
**Written by Ted Hooker and Tom Parkinson**
**Severin Films**




Not everyone can be Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing or Vincent Price. Take, for example, former-radio-DJ-turned-actor Mike Raven, whose film work consisted of minor roles in Hammer's mediocre *Lust for a Vampire* (where, ironically, his voice was dubbed by another actor) and Amicus Productions' *I, Monster*. He gave up acting after appearing in just two more films, and judging from one of them, 1971's *Crucible of Terror*, it's easy to see why.

In it, Raven plays psychotic artist Victor Clare, who creates life-sized bronze sculptures from his still-living models. Wanting to "immortalize" their beauty forever, he encases them in plaster moulds, leaving only an opening above one eye in which to pour hot molten metal from a nearby cauldron: the film's "crucible of terror." When one sculpture ends up in an exhibition organized by young art dealer John Davies (James Bolam), the piece generates much interest and he decides to ask the reclusive Victor if he would provide him with additional works to sell. Together, with Victor's lush of a son Michael and the pair's attractive spouses, Millie (Mary Maude) and Jane (Beth Morris), in tow, Davies heads off to the mad sculptor's cottage, which turns out to be inhabited by a mentally unstable wife, a model/mistress and an old friend who collects ancient ceremonial weapons. Soon, people start ending up dead. Is Victor back to his old habits, or is someone else doing the killing?

What starts off as a promising riff on Roger Corman's *A Bucket of Blood* quickly fizzles and we're left with a drearily talky script, a general lack of tension and an incredibly absurd twist ending. Further hindering the film is the inept performance of Raven himself (looking here like General Zod of the *Superman* films), who overacts throughout the picture. Strangely enough, Raven (real name Austin Churton Fairman) later became a sculptor, crafting numerous pieces incorporating religious and erotic themes before his death in 1997.

On the plus side, the murder sequences (including a victim crushed by a boulder, and another burned with acid) are sufficiently well done, and there's some interesting cinematography by Peter Newbrook (*The Black Torment, Corruption*). Sporting a crisp, widescreen transfer (but no extras) the film certainly looks good – but, as we all know, looks ain't everything..

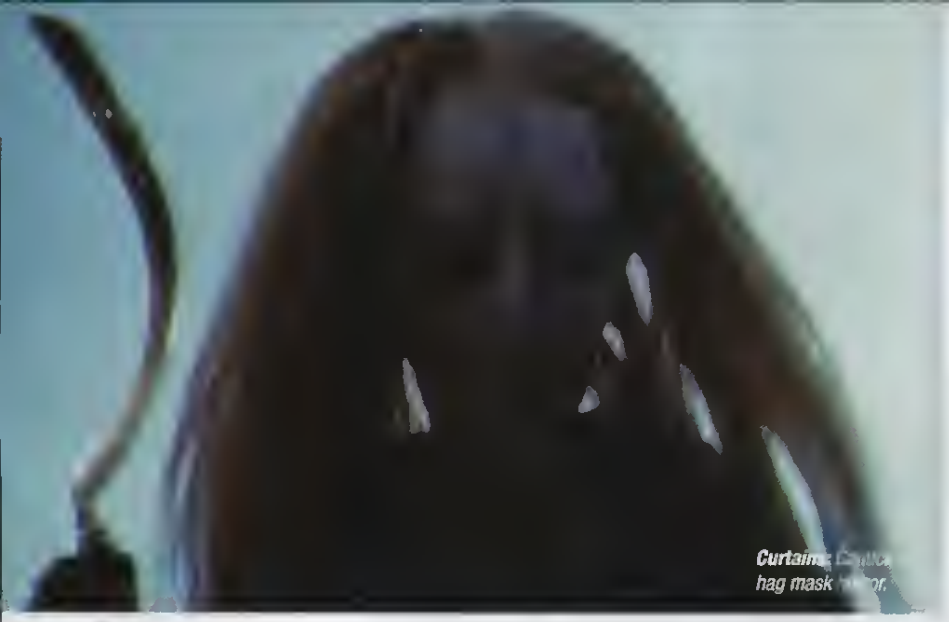
JAMES BURRELL

## BIG, BAD JOHN

### CURTAINS (1983) DVD

**Starring John Vernon, Samantha Eggar and Lynne Griffin**
**Directed by Richard Ciupka**
**Written by Robert Guza Jr.**
**Echo Bridge Entertainment**

We miss you, John Vernon. The Canadian character actor, who died in 2005, cut one of the meanest profiles in Hollywood, playing heavies and authority figures on TV and in films such as *Point Blank*, *Dirty Harry*, *Animal House* and *The Outlaw Josey Wales*. And, for us Canuxploitation lovers,



*Curtains*: Lynch's hag mask horror.

he'll always be remembered for his turn as sleazy producer Jonathan Stryker in the 1983 Canadian tax-shelter slasher *Curtains*.

Vernon appears alongside another familiar face in vintage hoser horror, Samantha Eggar (*The Brood*, *The Uncanny*). She plays Samantha Sherwood, an aspiring leading lady who gets herself committed to an asylum in order to study for a role as a mental patient in Stryker's latest movie. But in the dick move of all dick moves, he abandons her there and invites a bunch of wannabe starlets out to his mansion in the woods to compete for the part. She escapes and arrives to join the audition process. (Tense? You bet) Then someone starts killing off the girls.




What elevates this above average hack 'em up – aside from a great performance from Vernon as King of the Cads – are some particularly frightening moments, notably the famous scene of an ice skater attacked by someone in an old hag's mask. Only in Canada does a killer with three blades need two of them to get around.

*Curtains* is another one of the great under-the-radar horror flicks woefully neglected in the DVD boom, which unearthed and polished many a lesser gem with special edition re-releases. As you can guess by the fact that it's one of four films on this Midnight Horror Bloody Slashers Collection, this is not the release of *Curtains* we've been pining for. It's not widescreen, and the already muddy look of the film is rendered even dimmer by a transfer that's obviously just taken from a VHS tape.

So, is this a better-than-nothing scenario? If you're dying to see the movie, sure. But if you're a collector, wait for something better. At least the damn bootlegs feature the awesome original poster art of the creepy doll and the monstrous face. Be patient – the ghost of John Vernon implores you.

**DAVE ALEXANDER**

## FRIEND TO THE END

### GAMERA VS. GUIRON (1969) DVD

Starring Nobuhiro Kajima, Miyuki Akiyama and Christopher Murphy
Directed by Noriaki Yuasa
Written by Nisan Takahashi

### GAMERA VS. JIGER (1970)

Starring Tsutomu Takakuwa, Kelly Varis and Katherine Murphy
Directed by Noriaki Yuasa
Written by Nisan Takahashi
Shout! Factory

Hang on to your shells, it's once again time to follow the adventures of cinema's greatest giant radioactive turtle, courtesy of another Shout! Factory double feature. Now officially "friend to all children," Gamera's days of menacing humans (and decent budgets) may be long gone, but that doesn't mean there isn't some gleefully dumb fun to be wrung from *Gamera vs. Guiron* and *Gamera vs. Jiger*.

The fifth film in the series, *Gamera vs. Guiron* mercilessly recycles ideas from previous *Gamera* movies. Two boys – one American and one Japanese, natch – are whisked away in a flying saucer to an unknown planet protected by Guiron, a giant lumbering lizard whose head is shaped like a Bowie knife. Gamera heads off to rescue the kids, who are unaware the seemingly friendly female aliens secretly want to eat their brains.

As with 1967's *Gamera vs. Gyaos*, this is a particularly bloody (but still juvenile) entry that actually begins with Guiron defending his planet from Gyaos, even slicing off his head. There's less stock footage flashbacks but more distinctive *kaiju* silliness, including Gamera go-go dancing and doing parallel bar spins during his final skirmish with Guiron.

Largely an 80-minute ad for Osaka's Expo '70 world's fair, *Gamera vs. Jiger* at least tones down the campiness and tries to inject a little emotion into the story. Freed from his subterranean lair, the dino-like Jiger arrives in Japan and figuratively rapes our big green hero, using a protracting needle to implant eggs in Gamera's lung. As bewildered scientists look on, some plucky kids get their *Fantastic Voyage* on and navigate Gamera's insides in a mini-sub to heal him – just in time to save those all important tourism dollars.




As for Jiger, the creature is actually one of the series' toughest and most impressive enemies, with a detailed and well-articulated suit (whereas Gamera is looking a little shabby by this time). Despite the notable FX, this installment just isn't as effective as *Gamera vs. Guiron*'s sci-fi flights of fancy, though Gamera's apparent death gives the plot a nice shot in the arm.

But, of course, the only enemy who could ever really destroy Gamera is a bored and indifferent audience, which wouldn't appear until the next few lacklustre entries. Until then, these beautifully remastered films prove that, although his adventures are undeniably meant for children, Gamera should be friend to all.

**PAUL CORUPE**







# CINEMARQUEE

VINTAGE HORROR REISSUES



## IN ARMS' WAY

### SH! THE OCTOPUS (1937) DVD

**Starring Hugh Herbert, Allen Jenkins and Marcia Ralston**
**Directed by William C. McGann**
**Written by Ralph Spence, Ralph Murphy and Donald Gallaher**
**Warner Archive**

Most fans should be familiar with the classic Old Dark House setting in horror cinema, but how about an Old Oark Lighthouse? By the 1930s, the trappings of the Old Oark House genre had largely become clichés, and subsequent films started to add new wrinkles to the formula to poke fun at the convoluted plot twists, red herrings and spookshow tricks. Running a scant 54 minutes, *Sh! The Octopus* is a lighthouse-set chiller that ranks as one of the most frenzied and fun parodies of classic suspense films.

Things get started (naturally) on a dark and stormy evening, as police detectives Harold Kelly (Hugh Herbert) and Oempsey (Allen Jenkins) are called to a decrepit lighthouse, where heiress Vesta Vernoff (Marcia Ralston) claims her stepfather was killed. Vesta is convinced that a master criminal known as The Octopus is trying to steal his latest invention, a deadly "radium ray" weapon. When the bumbling cops arrive, they discover a corpse mysteriously hanging from the rafters and no shortage of suspects, including a hook-handed salty sea captain (George Rosener), an artist (John Eldredge), a shipwrecked socialite (Margaret Irving) and Vesta's elderly housekeeper (Elspeth Oudgeon).

Once Kelly and Oempsey get the body down, however, they discover it's not Vesta's stepdad after all – only a dummy dripping with ketchup. That's okay, because nobody else is what they seem either, and what follows is a madcap satire of spook story conventions with sliding panels, intermittent blackouts and underground chambers, as the cast tries to uncover the identity of The Octopus and collect the $50,000 bounty offered by the authorities.




The Old Dark House tradition goes all the way back to Gothic literature, but made its biggest pop culture splash in the 1920s. The mystery stage play *The Bat* was a Broadway smash and solidified many of the genre's archetypes. Its success led to a string of similar cinematic treats, including *The Gorilla*, *The Cat and the Canary*, *The Bat Whispers* and James Whale's *The Old Dark House*.

Of the Old Dark House horror-comedies that followed, *Sh! The Octopus* (also based on a stage play) is one of the most satisfying, even if it frequently makes no sense. The film's oddball humour is rarely due to the cast – comedians Jenkins and Herbert previously appeared together in a handful of shorts and features, but they never elicit more than a few chuckles with their wordplay and slapstick antics. Instead, it's the story's relentless twists and turns that progressively push the proceedings beyond logic, until everything ultimately folds in on itself in a bizarre coda that reveals that no murder ever happened – the whole movie was Kelly's fever dream while waiting for his wife to give birth.

That doesn't detract from the fun to be had from the film, though, which can still be enjoyed as a whodunnit story with an actual solution. Although all efforts are focused on stopping The Octopus, there's also a "real" octopus living in a grotto under the lighthouse. Just as The Octopus peers from secret passages at the lighthouse intruders, the octopus' tentacles wave from around corners to slam shut doors and even grab hapless victims (with the help of clearly visible wires). The Octopus' real identity is also revealed in a brilliant effects scene, in which the titular character's face appears to rapidly age and then turns gruesomely ugly – a convincing bit of camera trickery that adds an authentically frightening aftertaste to the amusing antics.

*Sh! The Octopus* debuts on home video, wiggly foam tentacles and all, as part of Warner Bros. Horror/Mystery Double Features. Warner Archive's new three-disc box set features similar eerie B-movie programmers *Find the Blackmailer* (1943), *The Smiling Ghost* (1941), *The Hidden Hand* (1942), *The Mystery House* (1938) and *The Patient in Room 18* (1938). Beware The Octopus!

**PAUL CORUPE**

# IT CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT

## R | DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

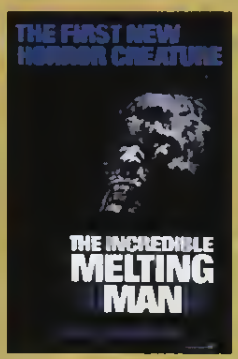
### STOP THE WORLD. MELT WITH ME.

by John W. Bowen



I can't even begin to calculate the number of times the phrase, "How did I manage to miss this film until now?" has appeared in this column. Given that *The Incredible Melting Man* was released in 1977, it's officially taken me 33 years to discover it, a fact I find both inexplicable and sad. I have no excuse, and can only attempt to make things right by exhorting the masses to track down this delirious, cheap-ass demolition derby of a film.

Given pop culture's tendency to go all misty-eyed for the popular nuggets of yesteryear, it's tempting to pigeonhole *TIMM* as a nod to '50s-era sci-fi. After all, few nostalgia crazes could match America's fixation with all things '50s during the 1970s; think *American Graffiti* (admittedly set in '62, but for all effects and purposes an elegy for the previous decade), which spawned the grossly inferior *Happy Days*, which in turn spawned the utterly vomitous *Grease* and the careers of several thousand Elvis impersonators. Who knows? Maybe that actually was what writer/director William Sachs (*Galaxina*) had in mind, but it sure ain't what he wound up with.




*TIMM* kicks off with a manned space mission to Saturn, during which some ambiguous thing goes terribly wrong, as evidenced by astronaut Steve West (Alex Rebar) getting a nosebleed. In the blink of a jaundiced eye (or nose?) we're back on Earth; details are scarce, but apparently Steve's fellow space jockeys didn't make it back alive. Did Steve himself has seen better days too, what with beginning to melt and being overcome by the urge to run around killing and partially eating people, first evidenced as he pursues a pudgy nurse down empty hospital corridors – and eventually through a plate-glass window – in agonizing slo-mo. At this point, most films would trot out a bit more exposition, but thankfully, *TIMM* ain't most films. Instead, it simply continues to lurch around for the next 80-odd minutes like some drunken, retarded wind-up toy.

But not to worry, Dr. Ted Nelson (Burr DeBenning) is on the case, assisted (kind of) by a really ineffective army general (Myron Healey), but it all has to be kept very hush-hush so as not to alarm the local gentry and to avoid having to hire a lot of expensive extras. Of course, this doesn't stop Dr. Ted from blabbing it all to his wife (Ann Sweeny) over lunch in a bizarre exchange that's apparently supposed to convey some sense of domesticity. Ted: "Steve escaped." Judy (bringing him soup): "Oh, God. What are you gonna do?" Ted: "Uh, did you get some crackers? I told you yesterday that we needed some crackers." Judy: "Oh, I forgot. I knew there was something. So what about Steve?" Ted: "So, we don't have any crackers?" Judy: "Ted, what about Steve?" Ted: "Steve? I've got to go out and find Steve." Sure enough, our unheroic heroes are soon on the hunt, which basically consists of traipsing around in the woods with a geiger counter and yelling "STEVE?!?"

Meanwhile, Steve's pool of victims and near-victims is generally more colourful than the usual coterie of B-horror cannon fodder. There's a fisherman who simply must find out what that noise in the bushes is ("You're gonna scare the fish!"), whose corpse is subsequently discovered by a photographer and a model who really, really doesn't want to take her top off. There are three young kids attempting to smoke their first cigarette and – in my absolute fave sequence – an elderly couple who steal fruit from a lemon grove. How could they not get killed in a movie like this?

Despite the no-name leads, the discerning nerd will notice some familiar names among the supporting cast, including Janus Blythe (Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes*), not-yet-superstar-director Jonathan Demme (*The Silence of the Lambs*) and beloved exploitation film legend Cheryl "Rainbeaux" Smith (*Lemora, Caged Heat, Massacre at Central High*) as the aforementioned reluctant topless model. Effects are furnished by future industry leaders Rick Baker and Greg Cannom, although somehow I doubt any *TIMM* footage made it into their highlight reels.

Now get the hell out of my besement and don't come back without crackers. (P.S. Serena, you're two for two.)

# GRAB ONE!




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IN THIS ISSUE
HARBOR MOON Ryan Colucci, Dikran Ornekian and Pawel Sambor
NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD #1 Mike Wolfer, John Russo and Tomas Aira
ANGEL VS. FRANKENSTEIN II John Byrne IDW
EDGE OF DOOM #1 Steve Niles and Kelley Jones IDW
X-MEN VS. VAMPIRES #1 Various Marvel
TOMB OF TERROR #1 Various Marvel

# BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

It sucks being a werewolf. Forget about the hair in embarrassing places or the compulsion to chow down on family members, it's the current lack of reverence within the horror community that's most disconcerting. In recent years, vampires and zombies have skyrocketed in popularity while werewolves have been left somewhat in the dust. Sure, they can be seen in popular franchises such as *Twilight* and *True Blood*, but let's be honest, in those worlds it's the vampires that get all the respect.

One of the problems with the werewolf's decline in popularity may be that while other monsters have received significant facelifts within their respective mythologies, most werewolf stories are still retelling the same basic narrative established in 1941's *The Wolf Man*. To wit: boy (or girl) gets bitten, is cursed, turns into werewolf, slaughters innocents, is tormented by guilt and is finally killed. Lather, rinse, repeat.

"Audiences are savvy enough to know they've seen it before," muses Ryan Colucci, writer of *Harbor Moon*, a new graphic novel that aims to pump fresh blood into the werewolf's veins. "Werewolves are hard, because they don't speak. And if you're following a lone wolf, you lose your hero when they turn. When your character is a vampire, he or she is a normal, speaking character. They're sexy and seductive. Werewolves don't join you for dinner – they destroy the house and eat you for dinner."




*Harbor Moon* opens with the rather disturbing image of a seemingly ordinary family massacred by a group of men. We are then introduced to Timothy Vance, a young man who has recently received a call from his long-lost father, inviting him to meet up in the small, secluded town of Harbor Moon, Maine. When Tim arrives, his father is missing and the townspeople aren't talking. Eventually he discovers the disturbing truth about the town, his heritage and a deadly, quasi-religious group called The Brotherhood of the Moon.

If this summary doesn't scream "werewolf story," it's because Colucci – who's also a film producer (the animated feature *Battle for Terra* and the upcoming adaptation of George R.R. Martin's horror novella *The Skin Trade*) – has constructed his tale to be first and foremost a mystery. In fact, werewolves don't even make an appearance until halfway through the narrative. "[Co-writer] Dikran Ornekian and I always told each other that we were writing a mystery, it just happened to involve werewolves. We wanted to put you into this creepy town and ratchet up the tension before we exposed the reality of the situation. ... The key for us was keeping readers guessing as to which characters are actually wolves. There's even a point in the story where the hero thinks he has it figured out and then he's thrown for a loop – and hopefully the reader is as well."



***Harbor Moon:*** *A brotherhood of small-town werewolves*

One element of the werewolf mythos that Colucci was especially keen to abandon is the lycanthropy curse. "We were extremely conscious of the fact that the werewolves of Harbor Moon are not a curse. They are also not a spirit. They are a species, a race if you will. You can't become a werewolf from a bite or a blood transfusion or an Indian ceremony. The wolves here don't turn on a full moon. They turn when they are pushed – if they are in stressful situations, angered, et cetera."

Once the curse angle was jettisoned, so too was the concept of the lone wolf. Instead, Colucci found inspiration in the 1981 film *The Howling*, which featured a close-knit community of werewolves.

"Because werewolves are usually a curse, I think you rarely see them portrayed in packs, which doesn't make much sense to me, because wolves travel in packs," he says. "We took a pretty different approach and tried to ground it in as much reality as possible. I know that sounds ridiculous – but we did our research on wolves and how they act and tried to infuse that into the story and the characters."

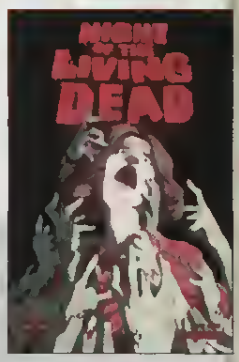
Despite the fierce competition that the werewolf faces in the horror landscape, Colucci is confident that our furry friends will nevertheless continue to strike a chord with audiences.

"Werewolves are tough. They play to our base instincts. Once they turn, there is not much logic going into their decisions. Vampires are all sleek and sexy, but they are soulless. You don't see too many vampire families. Werewolves act as a pack, looking out for each other. They are the working man's monster."

*Harbor Moon is on sale now at harbor-moon.com and will hit store shelves on March 1, 2011.*

# QUICK CUTS

REVIEWS BY PEDRO CABEZUELO




**I was initially wary** of this title, which is not an adaptabon of the onginal George A. Romero film, but an alternate prequel story taking place dunng the same era with a mostly new cast of characters. My fears escalated upon seeing the graturtous sex and nudity in the first couple of pages. However, once the titillabon dies down, the remainder of the issue features a nice balance of well-written characters and sabsfying zombie kills. I'm sbll unsure why the creators chose to set the story in the late 1960s, amidst peace rallies and the Vietnam War (other than the obvious nod to the 1968 film), over a more relevant, contemporary setting, especially in terms of modern social commentary. Hopefully, this creabve decision will pay off as this promising senes progresses.

**John Byrne returns** to the *Angel*-verse for this follow-up to last year's clash between Buffy's favourite vampire and Dr. Frankenstein's favourite creation. This time, the action takes place in New York City, shortly after the first World War and approximately 100 years after their last clash. Working as a janitor in a mental hospital, Angel stumbles upon a patient who's been locked away in the attic for many years. Turns out it's the creature (suffering from an identity crisis) and once he regains his spirits, the smackdown begins. Byrne packs a dense and entertaining story into only 24 pages and, as usual, his art is top-notch. *Angel* fans may be disappointed that little is added to the mythos but, as a result, the story can be easily enjoyed without previous knowledge of the character's world.







**Edge of Doom is** a five-issue series, with each installment presenting a stand-alone tale of the macabre (although writer Steve Niles has stated that there's a connection between the five stories). Up first is the grisly tale of Richard Stallman, a pathetic man trying to cope with his recent divorce. As if being left by your wife isn't bad enough, Richard discovers that there's an entire civilization of little people living under his garden – and they're not friendly. What ensues is a violent, bloody battle between man and a horde of flesh-eating Lilliputian-like warriors involving axes, arrows, torn flesh and popping eyeballs. Niles and Jones are clearly relishing the carnage and the fun is highly contagious. It's gory, over-the-top and one terrific read.




**Spinning off** from the *X-Men*'s current vampire-centric storyline is this two-issue miniseries of short stories chronicling various mutants scuffling with the undead. The participants this issue include Husk, Dazzler, Rogue and Magneto, as they desperately try to improve mutant/vampire relabons. The most enjoyable entry by far is the Dazzler tale, in which the ex-disco queen goes toe-to-toe with Sheba Sugarfang, a Pam Grier-type bloodsucka. The remaining entries, while not bad, take themselves a bit too seriously. As a whole, the book entertains but is totally unnecessary to the main storyline; it's more of a brief diversion. Also included as a bonus (and to justify the higher cover price) is a partial reprint of *Uncanny X-Men* #159, which features the team's first encounter with Dracula.

**Marvel continues to pay** homage to its old black and white mags with *Tomb of Terror*, four new stories starring Man-Thing, Son of Satan, Werewolf by Night and – in a text-only tale – the Living Mummy. The three comic tales show a surprising amount of characterization to go with the chills, an impressive feat considering they only average about ten pages each. Most poignant is the Man-Thing tale, which finds the creature's human consciousness fighting to stay in control of its monster body. Similarly, the Werewolf story sees Jack Russell hoping to cure his affliction by killing another wolf-man while attempting to justify the murder as being for the greater good. They're strong, character-driven pieces that elevate the tales from mere page fillers to highly satisfying reads.

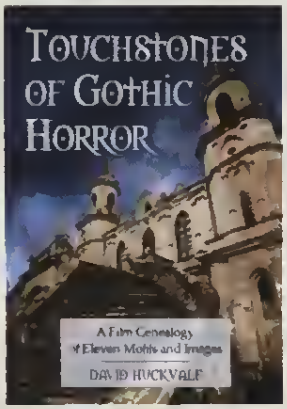









# THE NINTH CIRCLE BOOKS










## GOTHIC CINEMA SYMBOLISM • DEAD AND STUDIED • THE SCORE ON A-HORROR

### TOUCHSTONES OF GOTHIC HORROR: A FILM GENEALOGY OF ELEVEN MOTIFS AND IMAGES

**David Huckvale**
McFarland

One of the cornerstones of horror cinema, the Gothic chiller was a popular genre staple for decades. Exemplified by the output of Universal, Hammer Studios, A.I.P. and Amicus, these films, which often featured the now-standard trappings of ruined castles, decrepit cemeteries, supernatural beings and family curses, drew upon a number of 18th- and 19th-century influences – namely art, literature, architecture and nature.

With *Touchstones of Gothic Horror*, author David Huckvale identifies and analyzes eleven recurring themes that run throughout many Gothic horror films from the 1920s through to the 1970s. Architectural motifs such as the ubiquitous grand staircase – where many screen villains like to make their introduction (both Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee's Dracula greet Jonathan Harker on or by a staircase, for example) is discussed in the chapter "Stairway to Hell", "Ornate Coffins" looks at the opulent, decadent surroundings that act as near prisons for many of these emotionally tortured characters. Other chapters weigh in on the importance of thunderstorms and the symbolism of ruins – which, whether they're of ancient castles, abbeys or manor houses – act as a metaphor for death and decay and the ravages of time.

Additionally, the impact of such literary giants as Ann Radcliffe, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Bram Stoker and Edgar Allan Poe are examined, as are key works such as the 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole – widely considered to be the forerunner to the Gothic novel. Occultism, mysticism and Egyptology (Huckvale states that mummy movies are an embodiment of the West's misunderstanding and fear of the East) are also discussed.

By utilizing such aesthetics in their lushly mounted productions, Huckvale asserts that filmmakers such as James Whale, Tod Browning, Terence Fisher and Roger Corman were able to take elements of high art and successfully rework them, making these re-contextualized films more accessible and palatable to a wider audience.

Huckvale, who previously penned the superb *James Bernard, Composer To Count Dracula: A Critical Biography* and *Hammer Film Scores and the Musical Avant-Garde* has delivered another well-written and engaging volume. Readers may notice a slightly more scholarly tone to this project though; those with an understanding of art history and 18th- and 19th-century literature probably won't have to refer to the book's chapter notes for definitions too frequently (but they're still there for those who need them). Profusely illustrated with numerous etchings, film stills and photographs of various historical structures, monuments and filming locations, it's a fascinating read for anyone who has ever wanted to dig deeper into their favourite Gothic horror tale.

**JAMES BURRELL**

### WHEN THERE'S NO MORE ROOM IN HELL: THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE LIVING DEAD

**Andrea Subissati**
Lambert Academic Publishing

Given zombies' rise in popularity recently, it's not surprising that the undead have also invaded the halls of academia. From zombie courses being taught at the University of Baltimore to multiple academic essays being published, eggheads around the world have thrown in their two cents about the zombie's role as metaphor for all the world's ills.

Count among these Carleton University graduate Andrea Subissati, whose MA in sociology was earned with this little (95 pages!) tome. *When There's No More Room In Hell* applies the theory of cultural materialism to, not surprisingly, George A. Romero's zombie films, primarily the first three: *Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead*. Cultural materialism, for all you jugheads, is a Marxist method of literary and cultural analysis that basically explains how social power structures such as the Church or government dispense their ideologies via works of fiction, such as books or movies. At least I think that's what it is.

Subissati does her due diligence, explaining her analytical approach in the opening chapter before giving a potted history of actual zombies, leaning heavily on Canadian ethnobotanist Wade Davis' 1988 tome *Passage of Darkness*, which outlines the Haitian voodoo phenomenon. Here, she explains how post-Romero cannibalistic zombies are based on exaggerated, racist colonial characterizations of Haitians as the much-loathed Other. Subissati then takes us through the first three Romero *Dead* films in detail, especially *Night*, where she summarizes the various theories as to the film's larger sociological meanings in terms of racism and sexism.

Exactly how interesting all of this will be to the reader at large is debatable. Given that this is an academic text, *When There's No More Room In Hell* will be a slog for most general readers. Subissati's analyses of Romero's zombie oeuvre are sometimes intriguing and her arguments are well supported by quotes from other academics, but we are not the Carleton committee deciding her academic fate, so I have to give this a barely passing grade.

**SEAN PLUMMER**



**Asian Horror:** Supernatural Thai entry **Shutter.**

## ASIAN HORROR

**Andy Richards**
Kamera Books

Consider this your *Cole's Notes* guide to fright films from the East, and I mean that in the best way possible. Andy Richards' *Asian Horror* is as straightforward and to the point as its title and encompasses everything the casual reader needs to know to understand the genre, its major players and their important works.

After pointing out that Japan has been at the forefront of the Asian horror boom, Richards begins with a look at the country's history as it relates to its long lineage of supernatural *kaidan* tales and, later, post-atomic bomb, city-stomping *kaiju* films and, of course, the technophobic J-horror spawned in the '90s. He illustrates the influence of *kabuki* theatre, *ero-guro* woodcut prints and writer Edogawa Rampo; covers V-cinema (the very low-budget straight-to-video features that helped launch the careers of Takashi Shimizu and Takashi Miike) and notes the influence of Westerners, such as Sam Raimi and George A. Romero's respective stamps on Ryo Kitamura's *Versus*.

From there we go to Korea and China, before a brief stop in Thailand. By grouping several countries under the Asian Horror banner, Richards can compare and contrast in a way that reveals much about the cultures. For example, South Korea has its own version of *The Ring*, called *Ring Zero*, but you won't find anything in the country's cinematic canon nearly as explicit as Hong Kong's Category III films or Japan's softcore *pinku eiga* movies (nor in the even more conservative Thailand). While Richards is squeamish when it comes to the *Guinea Pig* movies, and he omits Nobuhiko Obayashi's cult classic *House*, overall the approach is well-rounded.

If you're an active Asian horror fan – say, the type that goes to Chinatown seeking imports and bootlegs – there's not much ground broken here. That said, you still might get something out of the "East Goes West. Lost in Translation" chapter, an excellent, up-to-date assessment of the poor treatment Asian horror films get when re-released and remade by Hollywood.

Ideal for newcomers seeking an efficient lay of the land (the reviews offer a strong starting point to explore) or as a quick reference guide for the schooled, *Asian Horror* deserves a spot on your shelf – where the cover image from *The Grudge* can glower malevolently at your other books.

**DAVE ALEXANDER**

# THE GRIM READER

## H.J. WARD




**David Saunders**
The Illustrated Press, Inc.

Even though H.J. Ward died young (of cancer at 35 in 1945), the prolific painter was responsible for some of the most iconic pulp illustrations ever created. His cover art – often featuring skeletons, ghouls or mad men menacing scantilyclad damsels – appeared on many serials of the 1930s and '40s, notably *Spicy Mystery Stories* and *Spicy Detective Stories*. To celebrate this master of the uncanny, David Saunders and the art historians behind *Illustration Magazine* bring us another beautifully printed, oversized art tome that's worthy of your coffee table.

**GARY PULLIN**

## GHOST STORIES OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR




**Edward Butts**
Dundurn

This examination of oft-told ghost tales from spectre-laden Newfoundland and Labrador collects genuinely scary encounters from local residents and adds a historical perspective to these phenomena. Within these pages you'll find the "Old Hag" who visits you in your sleep, fallen soldiers of the Seven Years' War and pirates that attack Cupers Cove, to name a few. Butts captures the darker side of this bedeviled region with his measured and (thankfully) non-sensationalistic prose.

**JESSA SOBCZUK**

## WINE AND RANK POISON



**Allyson Bird**
Dark Regions Press

*Wine and Rank Poison* offers up ten new stories from British Fantasy Award-winning author Allyson Bird. The current crop is of a fantastic and mythological bent, but it's Bird's focus on themes of injustice and revenge that give these tales their horror twists. The book has some highlights, such as "The Convent at Bazzano" concerning a family on holiday who are plagued by black scorpions, but is unfortunately marred by typographical errors throughout.

**BRIAN J. SHOWERS**







REJECTED FIFTEEN YEARS AGO FOR BEING TOO DARK, BOB FINGERMAN'S **PARIAH** FINALLY FINDS A PLACE WITHIN THE GROWING CANON OF ZOMBIE FICTION.

# NEVER MIND THE DEADITES

BY TREVOR TUMINSKI

**ZOMBIES HAVE BECOME AN EPIDEMIC ALRIGHT. FROM MOVIES TO BOOKS TO COMICS TO VIDEO GAMES, THE WALKING DEAD ARE ALIVE AND WELL IN THE MARKETPLACE. THAT SAID, YOU'D BE FORGIVEN IF YOU WROTE OFF BOB FINGERMAN'S NEW BOOK *PARIAH* – OUT NOW FROM TOR – AS THE LATEST CASH-IN ON THE ZOMBIE CRAZE.**

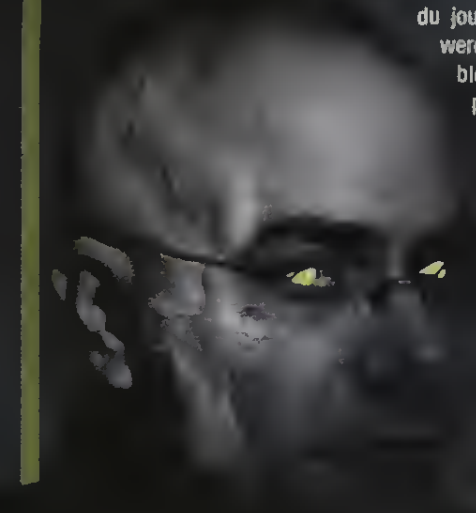
The author himself has even coined a tarm to describe this affliction from which you might be suffering: "zombie fatigue."

"It's got to be a bit hard to be discerning as a consumer if you like zombies and there's suddenly this avalanche of material," says Fingerman, who's perhaps best known for his work as both writer and illustrator of such comics series as *Minimum Wage* and the graphic novel *Recess Pieces*. "There's a candy commercial I saw recently that had a zombie in it, and I just thought, 'zombies are really losing their teeth.' If you've got a zombie in a candy commercial, how scary are they now? That's where it's up to somebody, hopefully like me, who takes it seriously, who wants it to have a real element of unease and horror and revulsion, and do it right."




If Fingerman can empathize with your plight, it's because ha's not just the latest author trying to capitalize on the zombie zeitgeist. The 46-year-old New Yorker, who also authored the well-received 2006 urban vampire novel *Bottomfeeder* (*RM#69*), has been fascinated with zombies since he was a kid. ("Once I saw *Night of the Living Dead* on TV, it kind of permanently distorted my brain," he recalls.)

Interestingly, he originally started pitching *Pariah* back in 1995, wall before shuffling z-bags became the monster du jour. Early drafts of the book were called everything from "too bleak" to "unpublishable" by publishers and peers alike. Years later, Fingerman would inject some hope into *Pariah*, though it "still isn't exactly what you'd call 'sunny.'"



For this, an unofficial sequel to his 2005 comics series *Zombia World: Winter's Dregs & Other Stories*, tha author sets his second book of prose amongst an unexplained, undaad apocalypsa, but that's only a backdrop for what is ultimately a mass character study. Despite the fact that the streets are crammed with zombies, it's the human drama involving a group of survivors aequestered in an apartment building that really gives *Pariah* life.

"Someone actually said to me, '*Pariah*'s kind of like *Gilligan's Island* with zombies,'" ha notes, with a chuckle. "That made me laugh and I wish that was actually a blurb on the book. [Tha zombies] are sort of the background noise. All of tha interesting noise is going on inside that apartment building."

At first, the tenants mostly keep to themselves as they battle starvation and periodically suffer horrifically descriptive losses to the hordes below. But it's when Fingerman's voyeurishc wandering eye moves from apartment to apartment that things get really interesting, as the diverse cast of well-drawn characters struggles to understand the predicament and survive both the zombies and each other.

As supplies dwindle and death seems nigh, a strange, monosyllabic girl named Mona appears. Seemingly immune to the zombies, she cuts a Moses-like awath through the streets unscathed, her omniprasent headphones blaring heavy metal music. She proves to be the group's saviour, procuring supplies and much-needed food, but the source of Mona's abilities – which Fingerman chooses to keep somewhat coyly ambiguous – eventually causes ripples amongst the survivors. Themes such as aging, alcoholism, drug abuse, homophobia, belief in God, loss of a child, rape, torture and racism are explored as they begin eating away at the apartment dwellers, without it all ever seeming heavy-handed or shoehorned in.

It's this manner of taut, character-driven drama (liberally doused in Fingerman's tradamark dark humour, of course) that's bound to draw compansons to both Stephen King's *The Mist* and Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead*, but it also could've worked in any number of settings. So why zombies? Fingerman confesses his empathy doesn't just end with you, dear reader. It seems he's got a real soft spot for the gut-munchers too.

"I'm not necessarily in love with humanity but I deeply feel for it, and I think zombies really embody that," he explains. "They really are the regular schmuck of the monster world. They had no choice in it, they're just stumbling around. Really, all they're doing is looking for a meal. How different are they from regular people? Thay tend to be pre-programmed. They don't think. They're a victim of circumstance. And they're evarywhere."

## RIDING THE BULLET
## DELUXE SPECIAL EDITION DOUBLE

**Stephen King and Mick Garris**
Lonely Road Books




Movie be-in editions of previously published fiction are nothing new, but this version of *Riding the Bullet* is. It marks the first time (to the best of this reviewer's knowledge) that a Stephen King story has gotten this particular treatment, a "flip book" with both the original short story and frequent King collaborator Mick Garris' subsequent film script included, along with copious production notes, photos, illustrations and commentary from the filmmaker. And while neither the story nor the film truly rank among King or Garris' best work, *Riding the Bullet* is particularly noteworthy for reasons both historic and personal.

In 2000, the story became the first piece of mass-market fiction released on the internet, prior to making its print debut in King's 2002 short story collection *Everything's Inevitable*. The initial downloading frenzy (at a measly $2.50 US) caused so many network crashes that the actual final sales figures remain ambiguous. It was also the first piece of fiction King wrote after the horrific traffic accident that nearly claimed his life in 1999.

Equal parts ghost story, morality fable and personal ruminabon on loss, *Riding the Bullet* follows college student Alan Parker as he hitches rides across Maine en route to see his ailing mother, encountering spirits of the dead along the way.

In his introduction, Garris explains that the tale struck a particularly raw nerve in him when it was first published because he'd recently lost several family members and had just learned that another was dying of cancer. Ultimately, his 2004 film was fairly faithful to the source material, with one significant alteration: being a child of the '60s himself, Garris changed the setting from the present day to 1969, ramping up the atmosphere of social upheaval and fleshing out the film's soundtrack with a number of classic rock staples from the era. (He notes, with no small amount of regret, that he wasn't able to license several Beatles songs he had originally wanted, despite initial approval from Yoko Ono.)

The filmmaker also details his script's lengthy stint in development hell, and while he makes no bones about his disappointment with *Bullet*'s box office performance at the hands of apathetic distributors, he's clearly satisfied with the end result of what was obviously a deeply personal project. Essentially, this release offers readers a candid behind-the-scenes look at how literature gets adapted for the big screen, which is interesting... regardless of how you feel about the story or film.

**JOHN W. BOWEN**

## WEREWOLVES AND SHAPESHIFTERS: ENCOUNTERS WITH THE BEAST WITHIN

**John Skipp, ed.**
Black Dog & Leventhal

If there are any doubts as to the versability of werewolf narratives, this new anthology should put them to rest, proving once and for all that there is a lot more to lycanthropic fiction than bite, change, hunt. Why then did editor John Skipp feel it necessary to broaden his theme to include other forms of shape-shifting? The answer isn't immediately obvious, but based on the superfluous praise he extolls on each of the tales during their brief intros, one gets the impression that it might have been to simply pack in more of what he loves – regardless of how it affects the collection.




Of the 35 tales within, some highlights include "Pieces of Ethan" (Adam-Troy Castro), which sees a young boy forever caught in the horrific throes of an incomplete transformation, David J. Schow's "Nof From Around Here," about a city slicker who must wage war against a ravenous rural menace; Alice Henderson's "Mandible," where disease control workers descend upon a neighbourhood to administer "inoculations" that turn everyday folks into oversized insects, and Cody Goodfellow's "Howl of the Sheep," in which a bullied boy turns the tables on his lycanthropic tormentors in a werewolf-dominated town.

*Werewolves and Shapeshifters* would have benefitted from a better balance between old versus new tales, but there's still plenty of variety when it comes to length (short stories, novellas) and execution (classic, gore-laden, erotic, bizarro, etc.). While this helps make the anthology feel well-rounded, there's no getting away from the fact that this all-encompassing aesthetic has bled into the book's curation as well, as there are some tales that barely fit the established parameters. Joe R. Lansdale's "Fire Dog," for instance, is a strange story about a man who dresses up as a canine for nine years, but is not a dog nor transforms into one. The excision of these only tangentially related stories would have made *Werewolves and Shapeshifters* a much stronger book. As it is, it's an intriguing – if somewhat schizophrenic – collection of stones about feral folks not entirely at home in their human skin suits.

**MONICA S. KUEBLER**

# LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

## FLOGGING AN UNDEAD HORSE

I was sitting at my desk, my idea for this month's column had just fallen through and I was momentarily stumped. Then a press release landed in my inbox for *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and the Undead*...

Like the ongoing deluge of no-budget zombie flicks, these monster takes on classic literature *just... won't... die.* I'll admit 2009's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (*RM#88*) was seriously clever. It worked because it was a totally unique premise, a novel (ha!) way to mash up literature of the past and present, and horror with the decidedly non-horrific. It was good fun, to boot. And also hugely successful – appealing to a far wider audience than merely horror fans.




This, of course, triggered the excessive bandwagon jumping that's been going on ever since, with titles such as *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* and *Jane Slayre*.

None of this is particularly surprising. Max Brooks' *The Zombie Survival Guide* was also a runaway success and to this day monster survival handbooks come across my desk on a weekly basis. And when Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* books shot up the *New York Times* best-seller list, suddenly the YA market was flooded with similar romantic vampire fodder. While this is undeniably good news for publishers who have their eyes solidly fixed on their bottom lines, it does a great disservice to our genre, not unlike the recent Hollywood trend of remakes and re-imaginings.

The inevitable result is a glut of these easy-to-market no-brainers filling up publishers' rosters, leaving less room for new ideas and fresh narratives. And less originality ultimately means that our beloved genre risks becoming stagnant and boring – at least until the next big trend comes along and the cycle repeats. (I'm sure at least some of you are also suffering from zombie/vampire fatigue.)

Make no mistake, entertainment is a business more so than ever before – we live in a time when marketing departments have more input into a book's cover than the author does – and businesses prefer tried-and-true sellers over taking risks, no matter how important experimentation may be to the genre's continued growth and relevance. In the end, the only way to combat this is to stop buying into the shill, whether it be remakes, survival guides or these damned monster-fied classics. Sadly, for better or worse, many horror fans are the ravenous sort, content to gobble up almost every genre offering out there for the sheer love of all things gross and gory. So, in many ways, we reap what we sow, but if we don't start to demand an infusion of fresh blood, I guarantee none of us will like the genre landscape in ten years.

**MONICA S. KUEBLER**

# TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR




## INTERNATIONAL CRYPTOZOOLOGY MUSEUM PORTLAND, MAINE

BY LYLE BLACKBURN

Mysterious ape men, sea monsters, blood-sucking aliens, snow creatures, living dinosaurs, human-sized moths, giant spiders, thunderbirds, Tasmanian tigers... they all populate the world of cryptozoology, which is defined as "the study of hidden animals." For as long as mankind has been around, there have been tales of strange and fantastic creatures that lurk on the fringes, but it wasn't until recently that a museum dedicated solely to cryptozoology was officially established. Opened in November of 2009 by curator and world-renowned cryptozoologist Loren Coleman, the International Cryptozoology Museum is located in the picturesque city of Portland, Maine, nestled among the quirky stores and coffee shops just a few blocks from the waterfront.

Rocky coasts line Portland's age-old shipping channels, which converge here from all over the world. Ships groan, lighthouses flash their lonely beacons and waves crash violently on the shores, bringing to mind tales of great sea serpents, while the roughly hewn brick streets conjure images of otherworldly Lovecraftian horrors. Heading inland, the coast quickly gives way to huge pines and timeless forests that host a variety of wildlife, including a few of the mysterious type, apparently. Against this inspiring backdrop, where voyagers stop to and from their worldly destinations, the unique museum is suitably placed.

The ICM is located on one of the most popular downtown thoroughfares, where it shares space with The Green Hand bookstore. One side of the glass storefront advertises literary treasures, while the other side offers a tantalizing display of Bigfoot statues and track castings. Entering the store, it's impossible to miss the massive Bigfoot statue, which is one of the most impressive pieces on exhibit. Known to cryptozoo enthusiasts as the "Crookston Bigfoot," this is an amazing representation of a Bigfoot creature based on popular sightings. It was created in the 1990s by Wisconsin taxidermist/artist Curtis Christensen and was displayed for a while in Crookston, Minnesota before it disappeared from public view. Coleman, knowing that it was an important piece of Bigfoot history, managed to track it down and was eventually able to acquire it for the ICM. Standing beside it for a photo op, you get a sense of how large one of these would be in real life – a sobering notion if you can imagine running into one in a dark wooded area... alone... at night.

The actual museum occupies the back of the bookstore and a mere $5 USD will gain you admission. Narrated tours are provided at no extra charge by Loren Coleman himself or by one of his knowledgeable associates. Whenever possible, the tour is personalized, so no matter what prior cryptozoology exposure or interest you may have, you can be assured of learning something new as your eyes take in the hundreds of items on display. The museum space currently consists of an entry hallway and one larger room where it packs in an impressive array of artifacts that, according to Coleman, is ever growing. In fact, between tours, he was in the process of bringing in more display cases in order to accommodate new items.

While I was quite certain there would be no mummified Nessie fin, no chupacabra carcass, no Sasquatch teeth or the like, I wondered how much there could possibly be to a museum dedicated to the science of hidden animals – sort of like a dinosaur museum without bones. But I soon learn that's not the point. Instead, it encompasses the entirety of cryptozoology's history, which includes everything from alleged sasquatch hair samples and tracks, to documentary and movie props, to a slew of pop culture toys and art based on cryptids. So while you're not going to find absolute proof that some of the most alluring crypto beasts are real, you will find an amazing number of related items in the small space.

After snapping a few photos of the Crookston Bigfoot, myself and my lovely assistant Sandy make tracks through the bookstore toward the ICM entrance. There we meet Coleman, who is the author of nearly 40 books on cryptozoology, the unexplained and the strange, so he certainly knows the subject! After a quick overview, he launchs into an informative explanation of the sea serpent items located in the entryway. One of the coolest of which is a detailed reproduction of the Feejee Mermaid (a.k.a. Fiji Mermaid), which was a carcass of mysterious origins displayed by P.T. Barnum back in the mid-1800s. As with many of cryptozoology's relics, a reproduction is the closest we'll get to the real thing since the original artifact was lost in the 1860s when Barnum's museum caught fire.

Moving into the main room, Coleman speaks about the various items that are grouped in general categories, such as Bigfoot/apes, chupacabras, living dinosaurs, fish, skull and mask reproductions, and other miscellaneous subjects. The Bigfoot track castings are particularly interesting, including one from the site of the famous Patterson-Gimlin film of 1967. You can also see an old Kodak movie camera much like the one Patterson used at the time, as well as a stabilized loop of the film playing above the display case. Having seen the footage countless times throughout the years, it is definitely cool to study a track taken from the famous Bluff Creek site, along with a few others

cast back in the 1950s by other veteran sasquatch researchers. In addition to the castings, a host of statues and toys based on Bigfoot are on display, as well as a number of skull and bust models based on real fossil discoveries of ancient ape-men such as gigantopithecus (who lived a mere 300,000 years ago).

Some of the most impressive ICM items are related to the yeti. Coleman has acquired relics from Tom Slick's influential 1950s expeditions to find the alleged beast, including hair samples, tracks and a tattered flag used by one of the search parties. Slick, a Texas millionaire and major player in early cryptozoology research, also had suspected ties to the CIA and established some of the largest scientific research facilities in the world. He was even the basis for the character "Tom Friend" in Hammer's 1957 film *The Abominable Snowman*.

An additional standout feature is a reproduction of the famous Minnesota Iceman, another creepy carcass of dubious origins shown around the US back in the 1960s. Other displays are dedicated to the Mothman (including movie props from *The Mothman Prophecies*, the 2002 film it inspired), the chupacabras (some really cool toys and even a namesake beer) and living dinosaurs such as Mokele-Mbembe, a brontosaurus-type animal alleged to live in the vast reaches of the Congo.

And finally, there are some figurines, toys and models reminding us of the "monsters" that were once part of cryptozoology but are now known. Think Coelacanth, Giant Panda, Mountain Gorilla, etc. Bigfoot and his cohorts may inspire a chuckle from non-believers, but lest we forget that notions of a pudgy black and white teddy bear were once laughed off as ridiculous. And the Mountain Gorilla used to only appear in whispered tales told by the African natives, scoffed at by mainstream science until its discovery in 1902. So, as you look around at the monster-inspired relics, just remember… some things are possible.

While in Portland be sure to check out the related attractions of interest, such as The Funbox Monster Emporium (across the street from the ICM) and the Wicked Walking Ghost Tour. The Green Hand Bookstore also boasts a nice collection of horror novels and cryptozoology books, and of course the ICM has a selection of T-shirts, books, DVDs and other souvenirs for sale. As the locals say, enjoy Strange Maine!

*International Cryptozoology Museum is located at 661 Congress Street, Portland, Maine. $5 USD covers admission. Open Wednesday through Sunday. Check cryptozoologymuseum.com or call 207-518-9496 for the most current hours of operation.*

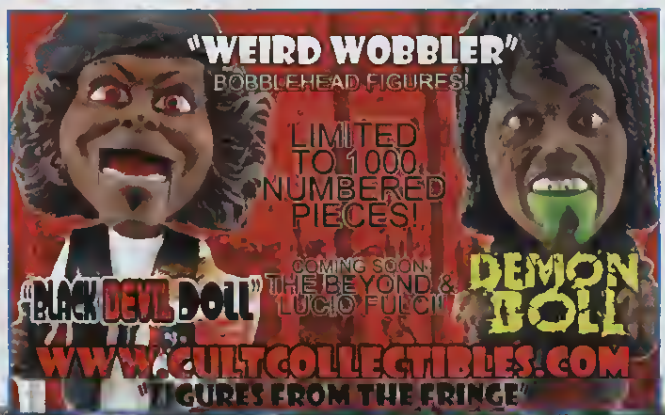









***A Cache Of Cryptids:*** *(clockwise from top) Part of the dinosaur and primate display featuring several large feline skulls, a reproduction of the Feejee Mermaid, the International Cryptozoology Museum storefront, artifacts from the Tom Swift Expedition and yeti relics, and (opposite) the Crookston Bigfoot.*








# THE GORE MET

## FACT, FICTION, SNUFF AND *S&MAN*



Videos have been prominent in Canadian news recently. The public and media have been transfixed by the story of Russell Williams, the former commander of the country's largest Canadian Forces base, who confessed to two first-degree murders, two sexual assaults with forcible confinement, and 82 break-and-enter charges. He began by stealing women's underwear, which he then started to put on and wear while masturbating in their beds, before progressing to rape and murder. He documented his crimes with photographs and video – including one of the murders – which he stored on two hard drives hidden in the ceiling of the basement of his home. That evidence will be destroyed upon Williams' death.

This chilling escalation from voyeurism to rape, murder and snuff is also the foundation of JT Petty's *S&Man*. The 2006 mockumentary (in which some of the subjects believe they're in an actual documentary) explores the connection between voyeurism and extreme horror films. (It's just been released on DVD and Blu-ray by Magnet after some rights issues were cleared up). Petty explains in the beginning of the film thet he had intended to make e documentary about a rampant neighbourhood voyeur from his childhood, but when his subject declined to appear on camera he turned his ettention to underground horror. Petty's principal interview subjects are scream queen Debbie D and filmmakers Bill Zebub, Fred Vogel and Eric Rost, as well as Prof. Carol J. Clover (author of the highly influential book *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*) and psychologists Meg Kaplan and Richard Krueger. The premise finds Petty perturbed by Rost's *S&Man* series, each episode of which features a women being surreptitiously stalked end murdered – and Rost is evasive and hostile when asked about his filmmaking process, to the point where it becomes apparent that maybe he isn't faking the snuff.




"The story with the peeping Tom from my childhood is true, but by the time I had brought the movie to HDNet, it was already pretty much set in my head," Petty says of the veracity of the film. "Portions of the movie are based on a story called 'S&Man' I published in *Cemetery Dance* magazine back in 2006. The pure documentary material and interviews shaped themselves, but were based on a pretty clear outline. The whole concept that a documentary is discovered in its making seems pretty dubious."

Labelling this a mockumentary is actually a bit disingenuous. Except for the Eric Rost segments – which are fictional and played by actor Erik Marcisak – this is otherwise a legitimate documentary.

"The only difference between Eric Rost and Bill Zebub is thet Erik Marcisak has shuffled off his Rost persona and gone back to his day job," Petty explains. "Bill Zebub is still in character. Before I ever started my documentary, I made a *S&Man* movie with Rost and he gave them out at conventions. I'm the first to embrace the emount of bullshit in the movie; my favourite reactions have all been audience's doubts about whether or not any of the other characters are real. And I hope that cynicism could carry over into the supposed truths presented in more traditional documentaries. I like what [Werner] Herzog says about 'ecstatic truth' in a doc being more important than 'truth'"

One of the most entertaining segments in the film is a carefully constructed edit of Vogel listing a litany of repugnant acts in *August Underground's Mordum*, which he ends with the statement, "You won't find this in Blockbuster." In Petty's manipulation of the interview footage, Vogel gets off lightly. But that was not the case with all the participants.

"The meanest edit of my career is the cut from Debbie D talking about her ambitions to Dr. Kaplan, laughing," Petty admits. "Obviously, she's laughing at something else, but the juxtaposition is only there to mock her. It still makes my skin crawl. The whole idea was to make people suspicious of my motives as a filmmaker, so I'm set up as this manipulative dickhead and the final reveal with Eric Rost makes sense. That being said, Bill, Fred, Debbie and everybody else involved say they like the movie. I do honestly love that they're in the world making what they make."

The persecution of Canadian FX artist Rémy Couture (*RM#106*) continues. He has opted for trial by jury and his case has been put forward. Stay tuned for further developments.



# SALES *from the* CRYPT

























TUNE IN. TURN ON. DROP DEAD!

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# AUDIO DROME

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REVIEWS BY TOMB DRAGOMIR, MARK R. HASAN, MONICA S. KUEBLER, AARON VON LUPTON, GEORGE PACHECO AND SEAN PLUMMER



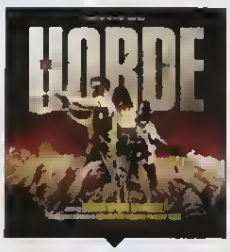

## DRAMMI GOTICI (GOTHIC DREAMS) SOUNDTRACK

**Ennio Morricone**

GDM

In 1976, Ennio Morricone scored a four-part Gothic horror anthology for Italian TV, but instead of lounge or rock elements, he chose to draw from his own burgeoning concert writing, particularly his chamber work. The core instruments include mandolin, clarinet, violin, tambourine and guitar, and besides the title music (which incorporates sound effects), the score proper consists of demented little themes arranged for chamber instruments. Prohibition-era jazz pops up in one cue, where a whistler glides atop a skittering rhythm, and a trio of organs provides a carnivalesque lament that degenerates into near-discordance. Edda Dell'Orso's voice is one of many dissonant elements in an angular suspense cue, but she adds a child's innocence to "Kaiserstrasse," a singsong theme with gorgeous medieval-styled harmonics. (A grimy tonal variation on strings is equally affective.) This small masterpiece of shadowy horror is mandatory for anyone's Morricone collection.

**MRH** ☠☠☠☠☠




## THE HORDE SOUNDTRACK

**Christopher Lennertz**

MovieScore Media

It takes a few listens to really appreciate Christopher Lennertz's large-scale orchestral soundscape, and although this doesn't add anything new to the zombie genre, *The Horde* does offer a lovely balance of flowing, melodic material and coarse, sometimes thunderous, dissonance. "The Beating" is dominated by electronic percussion, pliable metallic tones and electric guitar, but there's always a big orchestral canvas working busily underneath. The orchestral scope infers a biological infection that's going global, but the use of easily identifiable instruments, as well as a familiar fuzz-dusted rock beat, makes the drama local, if not believable, as a next-door danger is worming its way into one's own barricaded homestead. Lennertz creates the sensation of a menacing horde's viral presence and inevitable assault by adding every available instrument to the sonic arena, and he warps real and emulated sounds, piling on heavy percussion and sheets of vocal tones for the film's final battle.

**MRH** ☠☠☠½




## THE VAMPIRE DIARIES SOUNDTRACK

**Various**

EMI

If you prefer your soundtracks to boast excessive horror imagery or lyrical content about blood and death, this isn't for you. But if you've found yourself drawn into the dark, heavily music-driven TV series *The Vampire Diaries* (*True Blood* lite for the teen set), you'll likely find yourself pleased with the selection of alt-rock on this 64-minute disc – all bookended by a delectable pair of instrumental cuts from series composer Michael Suby. The undeniable highlight here is Placebo's downbeat cover of Kate Bush's pop hit "Running Up That Hill" (last heard in the *Daybreakers* trailer), but the remaining, mostly solid, songs run the gamut from ballads ("Bloodstream" remix by Stateless) to supremely catchy pop numbers (Sky Ferreira's "Obsession") to gloom rock (Howls' "Hammock"). With additional tracks from The Smashing Pumpkins and Gorillaz, this compilation is as fresh as a newly carved stake.

**MSK** ☠☠☠☠




## CRYPTIDZ PUNK

**Something Cryptid This Way Comes**

Cancer Claw Records

You can't say Cryptidz aren't bona fide genrephiles. The Orlando, Florida quartet was actually birthed out of a short horror film (*Bettie Deadly* – it's on YouTube) co-created by bassist Rob Reider and frontman Kam Lee, and the band's four-track EP *Something Cryptid This Way Comes* contains two songs, "The Sacred" and "2:22," written specifically for other horror shorts. But enthusiasm doesn't guarantee thrills and chills. *Something Cryptid*, while perfectly serviceable as a short, sharp but not particularly shocking amalgam of the band's most obvious influences (The Misfits, Ramones, The Cramps), brings nothing new to the horror punk table. Lead growler Lee infuses a severed-tongue-in-cheek energy into his vocals ("1-2-Fuck you!" in "The Sacred"), but it's not enough to make up for the fact that we've already heard this kind of twangy psychobilly from a thousand other bands with a hard-on for horror, ghastly girls and grizzly guitars. **SP** ☠☠½




## OCTOBER RISING PUNK

**Halloween**

Deadman Rocking Music

The latest release from Akron, Ohio's power punkers October Rising – three dudes who dress as undead commandos – is a metallic mix of monstrous marital pacts, rabbit-eating hippies and Lovecraft lust set to the tune of a bad '80s slasher flick. Seriously, the title track could have been cut from *Black Roses*, "Psycho" scares up *Trash*-era Alice Cooper and there are a couple of by-the-numbers covers (the Burt Bacharach-penned "Beware the Blob" from *The Blob* and The Cramps' "Human Fly"). The highlight is "Home-

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## KREEPS

**Dead Sounds**

Exi-Tone Records



Mixing bits of Joy Division, Buck 65, The Horrors and The Magnetic Fields into a sour cocktail all its own, Manchester's Kreeps is what a garage band might sound like if said garage was actually a mausoleum. Singing sad songs of blood lust and black hearts (the lyric "a scratched record never reaches the end" nicely sums up the fatalism worming throughout), Dom "The Count" Kreep and his band of experimental, similarly surnamed punks set *Dead Sounds* to the beat of a terrible tambourine, creeping keys, "suicide" synths and a haunted harmonica. Tunes range from downright dreary ("Fire in Heart Goes Out") to joyously nihilistic ("Cold Heart Twist," which also features a theremin rocking out over a surf guitar solo!). These strange, bastard waves for a dead generation are only rot 'n' roll, but we like it. **TD** ☠☠☠☠

# the BLOOD SPATTERED GUIDE

## VOLTAIRE'S SPOOKY STOCKING STUFFER

*"What I want, what I want is just your children."*
MARILYN MANSON

It can't be Halloween every day (unless you're Ministry) so we might as well celebrate Christmas. And might I respectfully suggest you put down some of the cheap plastic toys in your shopping cart and buy some music instead?

A fine gift for the ankle-biters in your life is the new CD *Spooky Songs for Creepy Kids* by Voltaire. The New York City musician has been making fun, dark-themed folk/gypsy/cabaret music for more than a decade. And while he's written music for children before, such as tracks for the Cartoon Network's *Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy*, his own CDs have displayed a more bawdy sense of humour. Now, for the first time, he's collected all of his more PG-rated numbers about pirates, vampires and zombies into one compilation.




Voltaire says the impetus for the kids' record was two-fold: a lot of the fans who've grown up with him now have children, and he admits that his songs about zombie prostitutes might not be the most family-friendly material. He's also developed an underage audience of his own from working with an online role-playing game called *Adventure Quest Worlds*.



"I'm a reoccurring character," he explains. "There's a little avatar of me and I lead players on monster-infested quests to get water or magical top hats and things of that nature. A lot of the people who play are twelve, but if they start investigating me they find that my music might not be right for them. I felt it was time to make a record for younger fans."

*Spooky Songs for Creepy Kids* (out on Projekt Records) features previously released tracks such as his arrgh-rated singalongs "The Ship's Going Down" and "The Beast of Pirate's Bay," newly edited versions of "Cannibal Buffet" and "Day of the Dead," the horror-themed lullaby "Goodnight Demonslayer," and a special *Twilight* version of his popular satire "Vampire Club" that pokes fun at the franchise. Wait, wouldn't that make some kids cry?

"The album is called *Spooky Songs for Creepy Kids* for a reason," he says. "I figured then parents would be warned that kids would have to be a little creepy to begin with before they gave them my record. It's not my fault if they become creepier."

LIISA LADOUCEUR

THE BLOOD SPATTERED GUIDE CAN BE HEARD WEEKLY ON RUEMORGUERADIO.COM

coming Night," a catchy Jan and Dean-esque tale of teenage tragedy set inside a crimson gymnasium. There isn't much fresh in *Halloween*'s horror punk stew but if you get a kick out of the ghoulish schtick of bands such as Helloween and Impaler, you could totally get down with October Rising. TD



### THRALL
METAL
**Away From the Haunts of Men**
MORIBUND

Given Tasmania's greatest cultural contribution is that of a whirling, bunny-hunting cartoon marsupial, taking *any* Tasmanian musical export seriously (never mind this ugly, underground black metal duo) requires stifling a certain amount of consternation and skepticism. Thrall's *Away From the Haunts of Men* doesn't exactly embarrass its country, but *caveat emptor*: this album isn't exactly the stuff of legend either. There's potential here with Tom Void and Em Støy's adventurous concoction of lo-fi tremolo-treble and dirge-like, horror-soaked doom. There's bleak beauty within the slow, grinding sections of ditties such as "Frozen Tears and Blood," as well as a genuinely crippling, choking coldness when the songs relent from the traditional black metal bluster. If the band could make the up-tempo sections more engaging – the unoriginal resemblance to early '90s Norsecore is just too blatant – or drop them all together, Thrall would be a genuinely creepy, punishing force. As it stands now, however, *Away From the Haunts of Men* sounds unfocused and unfinished. GP




### SARGEIST
METAL
**Let the Devil In**
MORIBUND

Not to be confused with Tomas Alfredson's *Let the Right One In* or Hammer's recent needless remake, Sargeist's invitation to *Let the Devil In* is a tempting one nonetheless, as it raises hell 'n' holocaust with its raging black metal sound and untamed atmosphere. It's rare these days to hear a band unleash a statement with such legitimate, old school intent as this Swedish outfit – apart from Watain with its *Lawless Darkness*, perhaps – given black metal's tendency to fritter away at trends of the day. Sargeist makes no such mistakes here, the band keeps its head down and horns up, scaring up a grim, urgent, semi-melodic attack reminiscent of prime Gorgoroth. Sargeist's latest is more than a mere memory lane trip, however; the album evokes a time when black metal sounded dangerous, frightening and electric. *Let the Devil In* takes relentless blast beats, epic, urgent riffing and a surprisingly warm production, and brings black metal back to the bowels of hell, where it belongs. GP



### STENCH
METAL
**In Putrescence**
AGONIA RECORDS

Stench is a Swedish death metal band that gets right to the heart of the matter: total fucking death. From opening screamer "The Blackness" to "Face of Death" and "The Ones Who Rot," Stench's debut is all about exploring our final destination, through both sound and imagery. That said, there is little to distinguish *In Putrescence* from the typical Swedish sound (old Entombed and Grave serve as easy comparisons), so it's not like they're using any novel ways to communicate their grim message. Stench's lineup includes members of Tribulation (*RM#89*) and, as a result, this album features design by that band's death-themed art department, Necromantic Art. All in all, Stench has turned in a perfectly serviceable dosage of dark, dirty aggression, but just isn't musically striking enough to be raising any eyebrows, or creative enough to paint an aesthetic any different from its death-dealing counterparts.
AVL




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Taking a left field approach to the art of dying, UK-based company And Vinyly (andvinyly.com) is determined to make your death something special – by pressing your cremated remains into a vinyl record, one that can be personalized with sound effects, music, artwork or personal messages for those you've left behind.

"Death is something not many people talk openly about," says company founder J., also known as The Undertaker. "The unknown is naturally frightening, so perhaps by providing an excuse to contemplate this in a creative, long-lasting way And Vinyly can reduce this fear of something we all have to face."

A standard package of 30 albums starts at a fairly steep £3000 ($4860 USD), but the varied options available to potential customers allow for a fair amount of personalization. Clients can supply their own photos, writing samples, personal artwork and doodles for the LP jacket or, alternatively, esteemed portrait painter James Hague or street artist Paul Insect can be commissioned to capture your likeness, even including your ashes in the paint so you can be a part of your own portrait.

"Reactions are extremely positive," J. says. "We've had some initial shock and horror, however. For example, a radio interviewer explained that initially she was horrified by the concept, but that on reflection she found it rather lovely. She explained that her father was recently deceased and she had answering machine messages that she cherished, which helped her to understand the attraction of leaving behind a personal record."

Though And Vinyly's website stresses the fact that, "despite the site's lighthearted tone, all our services are carried out with the utmost respect and care," it's understandable how someone might be offended given the imagined lines of decency most are afraid to cross. Among the various morbid services on offer are the option to only have particular body parts pressed into wax if you still wish to be buried, original music composed for your rockin' backing track, funeral planning and even worldwide distribution so your finished vinyl lands in record stores. Oh, and you can have your pet's ashes ground into grooves, too. Same prices as humans.

"I personally think that perhaps a proportion of people who don't like the concept aren't comfortable with the whole concept of immortality," suggests J. "I know that I'm not particularly keen on thie inevitability, and this is where the idea grew from – the struggle to contemplate my own immortality, mixed with the fact that I'm a producer of records. Whilst I was immersed in these morbid thoughts, I heard about an American chap who had his cremated remains put into fireworks for his family to enjoy. I thought this was brilliant. … I like to think that I'm putting a bit of fun into the process, and giving people a chance to keep making some noise when they're gone."

Turns out that And Vinyly's clientele isn't just made up of the morbidly curious or the curiously morbid, either. The company, which has been plying its trade since 2005, has received calls from all sorts of folks.

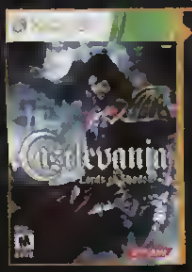
"The larger percentage of inquiries comes from music fans or relatives of music fans, but there are also people who are just intrigued by the concept of considering what information they would include on their personal record," explains J. "There are also people who already own the cremated remains of loved ones who they know would have loved this idea. These customers are extremely excited, even if most of them quantify their inquiry with, 'Hopefully I won't need this service soon, but...'"

And does J. himself have plans to undergo the process when the time comes?

"Absolutely. It's in my will."

# PLAY DEAD

**NOW PLAYING >** CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW, DEAD RISING 2, DEAD SPACE: IGNITION




## CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW

**PS3, Xbox 360**
*Konami*

In an age of remakes and reboots, it was only a matter of time before the longest-running horror adventure series (twenty games and counting) was refreshed for a new generation of gamers.

*Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* is a re-imagining of the classic franchise that introduces players to a new member of the Belmont clan, Gabriel, and new big bads, The Lords of Shadow. Brooding anti-hero Gabriel – a warrior of the Brotherhood of Light (a holy order of knights who battle the supernatural nasties of the world) – is on a mission to avenge the murder of his wife, defeat the Lords of Shadow and locate a relic known as "The God Mask," which may allow him to revive his lost love.

Konami even attracted Hollywood talent to lend their voices to this new installment; *28 Weeks Later*'s Robert Carlyle turns in a bored-sounding performance as Gabriel, while *Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s Patrick Stewart (as Gabriel's mentor Zobek) seems to revel in the game's admittedly corny dialogue.

As in other installments, players will face werewolves, vampires (which bear a remarkable resemblance to the Subsiders from 2009's *Daybreakers*), giant spiders, zombies and skeletons, as well as the mountain-sized bosses that seem to be a requisite feature of almost all genre video games these days. To fight these ravenous hordes, Gabriel is equipped with the familiar chain whip, as well as secondary weapons such as silver daggers, holy water and two varieties of magic to supplement attacks: light (which heals) and dark (which increases damage). The game's pseudo-RPG elements allow players to purchase new attacks and upgrade their secondary weapons with experience points gained by defeating enemies and solving puzzles.

The *Castlevania* series is famous for its difficulty and this installment can be a little too challenging at times. While the puzzles are designed to balance out the gameplay, they actually become stumbling blocks, as they tend to be both overly difficult and monotonous. Combat is still frantic and fun, though, with multitudes of enemies appearing onscreen at once, but as the game progresses, strategy quickly gives way to a reliance on three or four of the potentially dozens of combo attacks, with the rest left to aggressive button-mashing. Because the boss battles now conclude with genre-standard, brutal and bloody key-combo kills, *Castlevania: LoS* is in fact a closer relative to contemporary action adventure titles such as *God of War* than any of its *Castlevania* predecessors. At times, *Lords of Shadow* even threatens to become *Lord of the Rings with Vampires* by introducing creatures such as wargs, a character named Gandolfi(!) and more fantasy clichés than you can shake a gibbering goblin at.







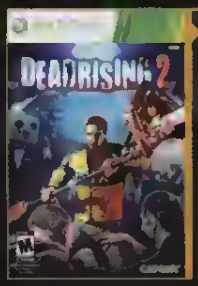
While many modern video games are providing gamers with ever-increasing freedom to explore their fantastic realms via sandbox-style play, sadly, this isn't the case with *Castlevania: LoS*. Instead, players are (mis)treated to linear, straightforward game progression coupled with that ever-annoying fixed camera. While it is fair to say that this game offers one of the better third-person fixed camera systems, there are still several infuriating instances where the camera gets stuck on an unseen object and obscures Gabriel during battle or masks vital clues to level completion.

Regardless, the art direction and design really stand out; the crypts, ancient ruins, Gothic castles and even Frankenstein's laboratory are rendered so beautifully that it's clear the designers enjoyed the world they were creating. The characters and monsters receive the same treatment – both are extremely detailed and a joy to watch in action. All more the pity, then, that the camera system limits one's ability to enjoy the visuals and become fully immersed in this haunting world.

While there is little here to motivate gamers to replay *Lords of Shadow* after completion (aside from gaining more spells and power-ups), the game still offers more than twenty hours of storyline gameplay, nostalgic Easter egg references to previous *Castlevania* titles and unlockable concept artwork. But is it a worthy reboot of the franchise? Sorry, not quite.

**JUSTIN ERICKSON**

**HEADSHOTS:** EXCELLENT CREATURE AND ENVIRONMENT DESIGN, IMPRESSIVE LARGER-THAN-LIFE BOSSES
**MISFIRES:** LINEAR, REPETITIVE GAMEPLAY, FIXED CAMERA, BUTTON-MASHING COMBAT




## DEAD RISING 2

**Xbox, PS3, PC**
*Capcom*



The dead are walking once more, this time in Fortune City, Nevada, and the whole sorry debacle is being blamed on you. As in *DR2: Case Zero*, the downloadable prologue companion game released earlier this year, you're Chuck Greene, ex-motocross star and father to infected Katey (who needs a dose of Zombrex every 24 hours or she'll get bitey) and you have 72 in-game hours to find out who's behind the frame job.

*Dead Rising 2* improves on the original in several key ways. Notably, the photography-for-points system is gone, allowing more time for bashing rotters, saving survivors, playing money-making mini-games and building weird, incredibly fun carnage-inducing weapons (among them an electrified wheelchair and "The Defiler," a sledgehammer/fire axe combo). The survivors you rescue now follow with considerably less prodding (almost too easily, in fact), though many make demands before taking a single step. And the gore is even more over-the-top, Chuck literally gets painted red this time out.

Where *DR2* falters is in its uneven boss fights, which vary from relatively easy to gruelling. Often requiring specific weapon combos or methods of attack, they can bring gameplay to a halt until the "trick" is discovered. As in the original, players can restart the game and maintain their level – a good thing, too, because the quests run on a clock and it's easy to get tied up completing one while the time on another key mission runs out.

While turning zombies to slop piles is never-ending fun, replay value increases for online players. They can jump into a friend's game on the fly for co-op carnage or go head-to-head against multiple gamers in nine different "Terror is Reality" challenges, most of which involve killing as many shamblers as possible and spilling buckets of blood while doing it.

While *DR2* would undoubtedly benefit from a local co-op mode, there's much to love here, just remember to wash off all those brains 'n' guts when you're done.

**MONICA S. KUEBLER**

**HEADSHOTS:** STELLAR GRAPHICS, FUN WEAPON-BUILDING SYSTEM, GOOD REPLAY VALUE
**MISFIRES:** SOME BOSSES ARE INCREDIBLY DIFFICULT, NO LOCAL MULTI-PLAYER




## DEAD SPACE: IGNITION

**Xbox 360, PS3**
*Electronic Arts*



In order to whet your appetite for *Dead Space 2*, which hits stores in January 2011, EA has released *Dead Space: Ignition*, a downloadable prequel that'll take you back to where it all began.

On a space station known as The Sprawl players take on three mini-games that are interspersed between a number of animated cut-scenes, as the Necromorphs attack and all hell breaks loose on the base.

The goal of each mini-game is to either open a door or repair some broken electronics. In one instance, you have to place mirrors on a circuit board in order to bounce lasers towards an intended target, while in another you must navigate a light beam through a maze – yawn...

Fans of the original outing will be hugely disappointed by the subpar art that plagues the entire game – character's faces and bodies continually change and sometimes are completely unrecognizable. This is a real shame since the artwork in *Dead Space* was so impressive and this just looks lazy and rushed. Perhaps it would be forgivable if gameplay rocked, but it doesn't. In fact, the only thing of any interest here is that you can unlock a number of health packs, power nodes, audio logs and an exclusive armoured suit that you can use in the upcoming *Dead Space 2*. Whether that's worth subjecting yourself to this snoozefest is entirely up to you.

**LAST CHANCE LANCE**

**HEADSHOTS:** COOL STORYLINE, SOLID VOICE ACTING AND SOUND EFFECTS
**MISFIRES:** HORRIBLE ARTWORK, BORING GAMEPLAY

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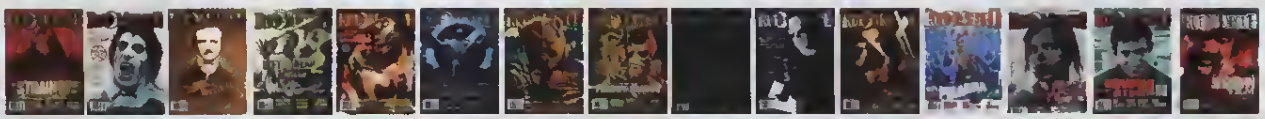
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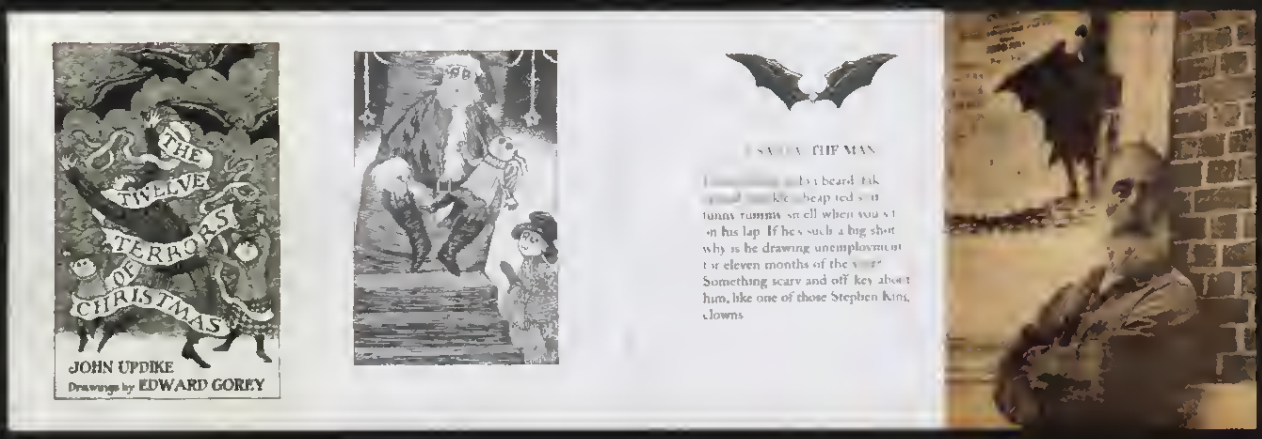
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# CLASSIC CUT

## THE TWELVE TERRORS OF CHRISTMAS

JOHN UPDIKE AND EDWARD GOREY — USA 1993




There's a decent chance that even your most unrepentantly cheerful friends have come across John Updike's *The Twelve Terrors of Christmas*. The late writer's crabby enumeration of Yuletide's more dubious traditions has been reprinted in volumes such as *Christmas at the New Yorker* and *The Best American Humor 1994*; it's even made the rounds as an email forward with regularity. But never has it reached the heights that it achieved in 1993, when it appeared as a natty little volume illustrated by Edward Gorey.

Gorey was no stranger to Christmas fare. The famously eccentric artist (who died on April 15, 2000) designed a number of Christmas cards, often for charity, and contributed cover and interior illustrations for books, such as Polly Redford's *The Christmas Bower*. He even wrote and illustrated his own Christmas stories, including *The Water Flowers* and, perhaps most notably, *The Haunted Tea-Cosy: A Dispirited and Distasteful Diversion for Christmas*. The former sees a family painting their Christmas ornaments black when one of their number succumbs, on Christmas Eve, to an ineldious white sauce; the latter is an overt send-up of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, where Gorey's Scrooge stand-in must face the Spirits of Christmas That Never Was, Christmas That Isn't and Christmas That Never Will Be.

Like Updike, Gorey (pictured above) also enjoyed a long-standing and productive relationship with *The New Yorker*. (Fittingly, the December 21, 1992 edition of the magazine, where *The Twelve Terrors of Christmas* was originally published, also boasts a Christmas-themed cover by Gorey.) But the pairing wasn't simply a result of professional connections; Gorey's gleefully morbid pen-and-ink drawings were ideally suited to Updike's curmudgeonly observations. After all, *Terrors* casts a cynical eye on some of our most beloved holiday traditions. Updike warns of an impending "bloody rebellion" at the North Pole (sweatshops, you know), and turns the Christmas tree into a sort of eldritch Lovecraftian horror ("At night, you can hear it rustling and slurping water out of the bucket."). Even the fat man's reindeer are suspect, with their "hooves that cut through roof shingles like linoleum knives" and "fur possibly laden with disease-bearing ticks." It's bats over jingle bells from beginning to end.

Of the twelve terrors, a full quarter of them are directed at St. Nick. The first terror is Santa himself, whom Updike compares to Pennywise the clown ("Something scary and off-key about him, like one of those Stephen King clowns"). Of course, the very idea of Santa is shady enough, hence the second terror: Santa Clause, the concept. He is, after all, "a man of no plausible address, with no apparent source for his considerable wealth," who "comes down the chimney after midnight while decent, law-abiding citizens are snug in their beds."

The other terrors are hit-and-miss affairs. It's nice to see a Christmas tome that acknowledges the season's constant threat of electrocution (the sixth terror) and Updike was right to be afraid of Christmas carols and holiday television specials (the seventh and eighth terrors, respectively), but only Gorey's illustrations make these passages particularly memorable. The ninth, tenth and eleventh terrors – Fear of Not Giving Enough, Fear of Not Receiving Enough and Fear of Returns – call us out on our tendency toward rampant materialism, and the whole affair reaches a deliciously twisted crescendo when the final terror compares the holiday season to hell on Earth.

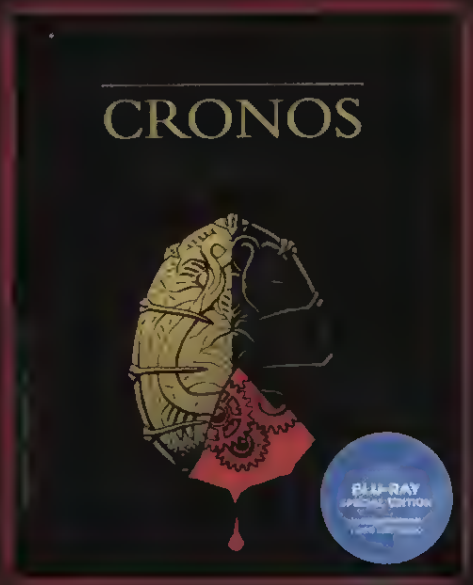
Along with Tim Burton, whose gothy masterpiece *The Nightmare Before Christmas* was also released in 1993, Updike and Gorey made room for horror fans in front of the Yuletide fireplace. Sure, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* tossed us a bone in 1966 by featuring Boris Karloff as its narrator and titular meanie, but 1993 was really the year that made Christmas happily horrible.

*The Twelve Terrors of Christmas* will never join the canon of mainstream holiday classics, but it's an indispensable stocking stuffer for horror fans. At the very least, it's the closest Gorey ever came to illustrating a postmodern Christmas tale of reindeer, elves and shopping mall Santas. It might even give us a glimpse into the legendary illustrator's psyche, at least as it pertains to our contemporary take on holiday traditions. There's a good chance that Gorey agreed, to some extent, with Voldar, the crabby little guy with the porn star mustache in the 1964 film *Santa Claus Conquers the Martians*: It's an awful lot of trouble over a fat little man in a red suit.

APRIL SNELLINGS

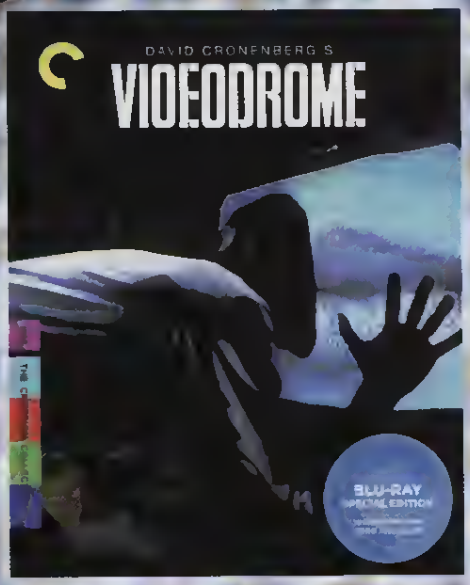
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